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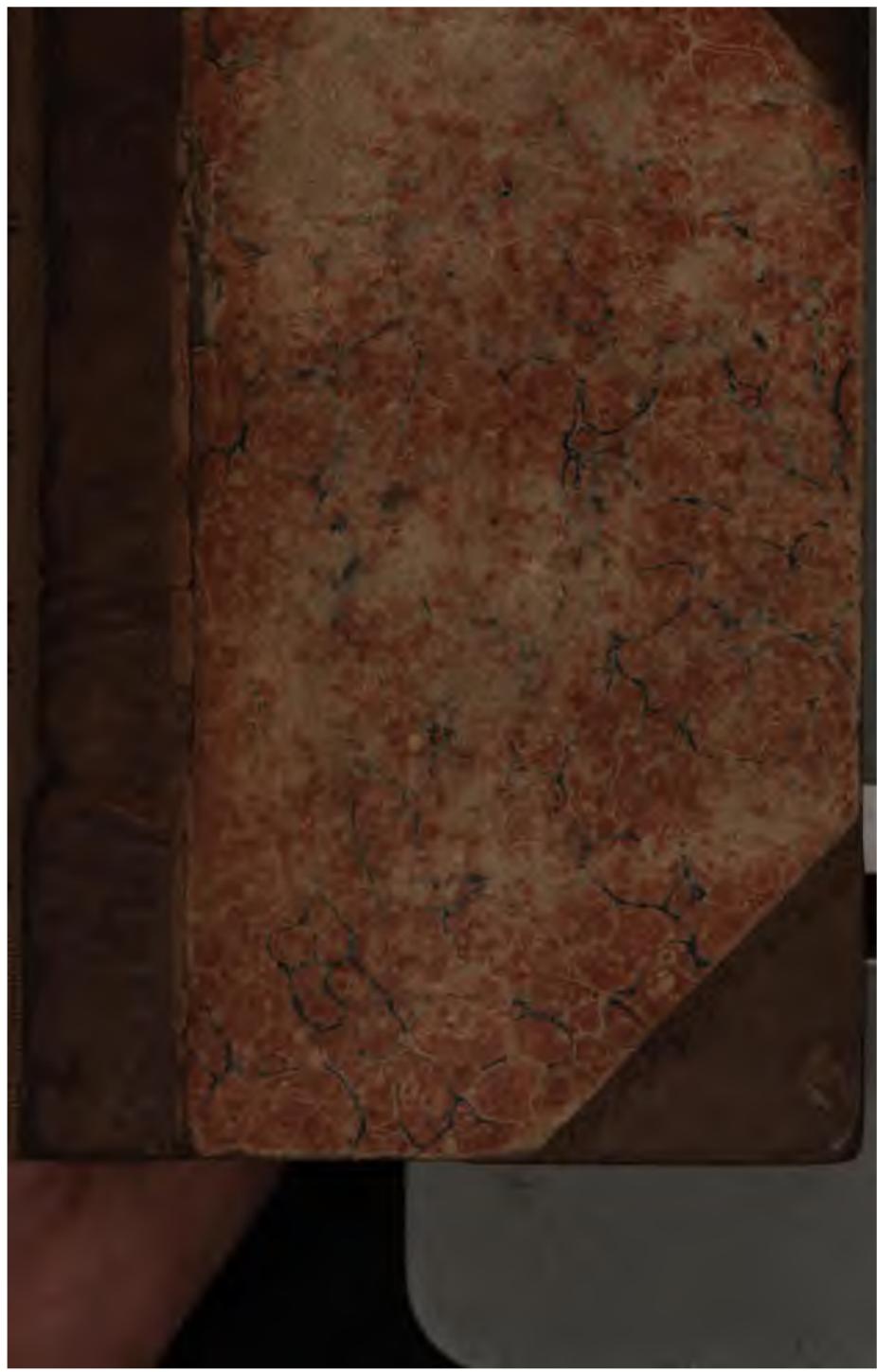
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# MY VILLAGE,

VERSUS

# “OUR VILLAGE.”

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
“BARNEY MAHONEY.”

“ For village life is not all à la Mitford,  
Or else, 'tis very plain that I'm unfit for 't.' ”

AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE.

LONDON;  
H. FISHER, R. FISHER, AND P. JACKSON.

1833.

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A PLEASANT book there is, yclept "Our Village"  
By one Miss Mary Russell Mitford written ;  
With which work being singularly smitten,  
I sighed for shady lanes, and fields of tillage,  
Deeming that "man-traps" would keep fruit from  
pillage,  
And country heart, to be like merry kitten.  
In short, I was by love of country bitten,  
And pictured rural life, a new and still age.  
Wherefore I left the smoke-enshrouded London,  
And found me out a neat suburban dwelling,  
Its porch entwin'd with woodbine sweetly  
smelling.  
Alas, the change !—would I had left it undone !  
For village life is not all à la Mitford,  
Or else, 'tis very plain that I'm unfit for 't.



## MY VILLAGE,

VERSUS

## OUR VILLAGE.



### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCTION.

VILLAGES there may be, all smiling, verdant, and sunny, such as Miss Mitford describes Aberleigh. Nay, such there are ; for I have rambled over the very ground she has made so interesting, and traced her progress from house to house, amusing myself by exclaiming, —“That ‘must’ be farmer Brookes’s cottage ! and ‘there’ Dame Wheeler surely lives. Let me see where Olive Hathaway is to be found. —Oh, there she is ! the very, living original of a most sweet portrait—so quiet ! so humble

—so every thing to be painted by the graphic hand of a Mitford—and so worthy to be appropriated in the proud title, “Our Village.” In this prettiest and most picturesque of all villages, I found not one cottage without its peculiar claims to admiration. And so neat is the outward appearance of every dwelling,—so trim their little gardens, so flourishing meadow, field, and shrubbery, at Aberleigh,—such a look of comfort, good humour, and happiness in every face I met, that I could not help repeating—“Well! this is the very prettiest spot I ever beheld! Miss Mitford must have first made it, and then have given to the world a ‘fair copy.’”

How totally unlike to Brampton; where three years of my life were passed, during which period no act of neighbourly kindness was discoverable, nor did I ever, by any chance, hear one word spoken in praise of the absent. To credit the account given of their neighbours, by each resident of Brampton, its inhabitants were an unanimously hard-drinking, unprincipled, envious set of people.

Idle they certainly were, as I myself can attest; and no wonder, for they gave such

close attention to the actions of others, there was no time to spare for work : so that when a job was offered to any of the various professors of different trades, it seldom was accomplished within any reasonable time, and one never dared to venture on employing the same person twice.

To use the words of one of the villagers, it is “just the most unneighbourliest, backbitingest, quarrelsomest place that ever the sun shone upon.”

A Common it has, a Green for cricketing, a River flows close to its very doors, but even “clean water, and plenty of it,” (as my little friend Jessy cried out, on first seeing the sea,) does not induce the least symptom of cleanliness. The river glides past unadmired and unseen, for the houses are placed with their backs towards it.

The Green is a scene of contention, so often as the periodical matches of cricket with the adjacent villages of Upton and Kingsmead take place, when may be observed a more than usual portion of quarrelling, noise, and drunkenness; and the only benefit apparently derived from these rustic assemblages, is in the

increased demand for drinkables of every description from the "Full Moon :" which, at such times, it is confidently asserted by its thirsty frequenters, invariably scores double. And John Brewster, the jolly Landlord of the same, is loudly envied and begrimed the "mint of money" he is accused of making. Notwithstanding, it is at the same time allowed that himself, his wife, and household, in general, fight, and go to bed "rolling drunk" every night of their lives.

The fact is, the man is an industrious, painstaking, and healthy-looking individual as one may see. Civil (as civility goes at Brampton.) The wife, by some thought pretty,—attentive to business, and not much of a gossip all things considered.

Still, they are believed to make money, ergo, they have the ill word of every soul in the village.

Then, as for the Common, where the parishioners are allowed to turn out three cows each, and to cut and carry as much furze as they please for firing;—even these privileges become a bone of contention, and one half the inhabitants spend their time in watching that

the rest do not infringe upon the rights of commonage.

"Mrs. Crust, has your husband finished my shoes yet?" "No, Ma'am, I think not, he has not been at home, indeed, the last three days, for he took a bit of money for a pair of boots he's had in hands since Christmas, and I never seen no signs on him 'till he'd drinked it every farthin'—three blessed days he's been at the Full Moon, and never rolled home till his pockets were emptied, this morning. I'm sure I wonder how Mrs. Brewster can have the conscience to let a man, that's got a family too, sit and spend his money that way—but there—to be sure, what can one expect from such as she,—there's nobody gives her a good name—didn't she marry her present husband before the first had been three months under ground—and smother her own child."

"Nay, stop, Mrs. Crust, you know that business was thoroughly examined by the proper authorities, and she was perfectly exonerated from even the charge of carelessness."

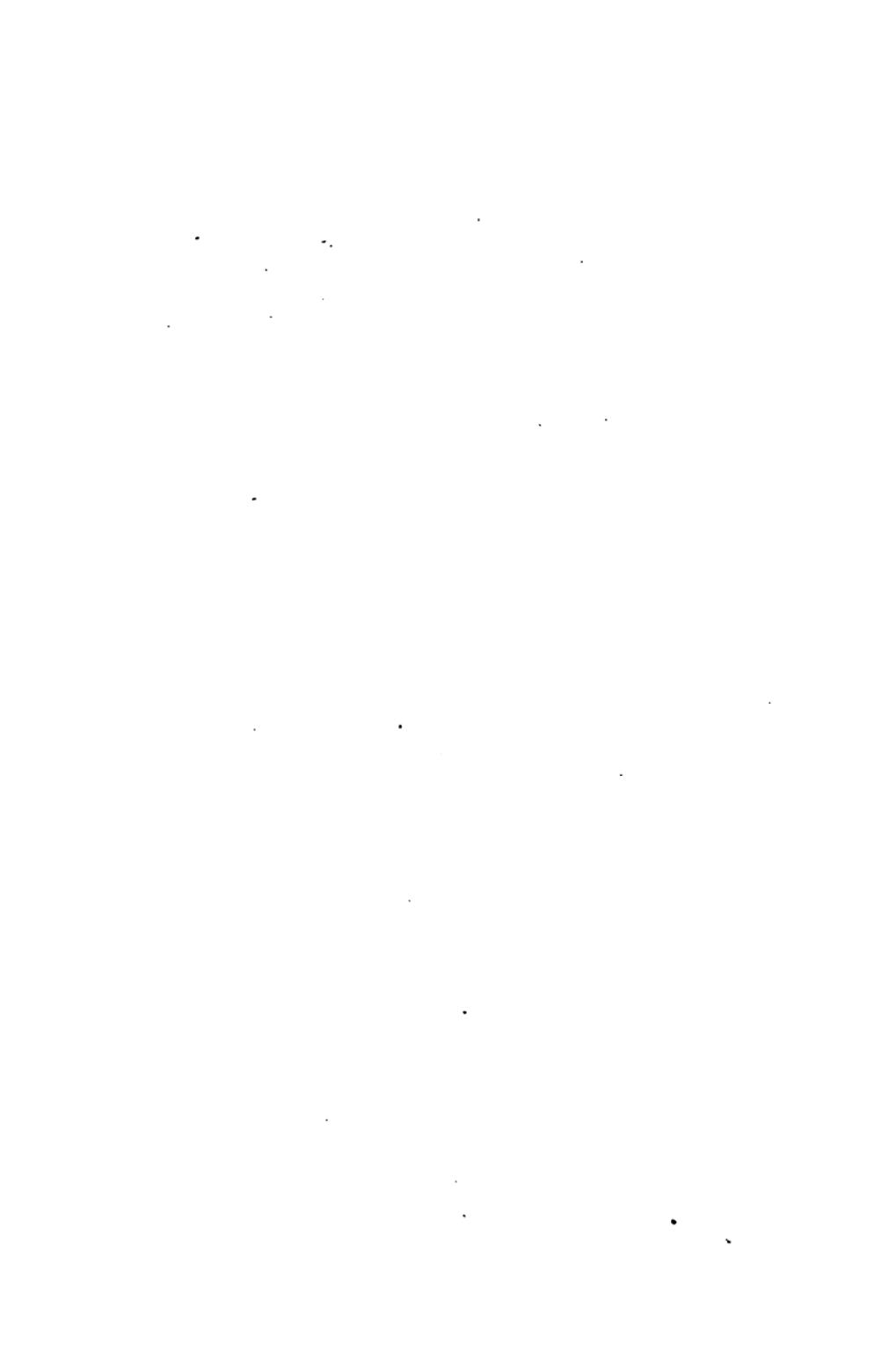
"Oh, yes Ma'am, I know the c'rowner's quest sat upon the body—and all that—and



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so I could not quite believe her, and there I counted hanging to dry, fifteen pair of sheets, twenty-five shirts, besides loads of table-linen and small things : and now I'm so tired, I declare I can scarcely stand, but I just stepped to the door as you came, Ma'am, and was noticing how long that young gard'ner would stand chattering with Sally Dawson up the street there—and if she hasn't been a giggling and tom-foosleing with him an hour and three quarters, I'm telling a lie. Well, much good may she get by it—her mother ought to know better than to encourage her in such ways, if all tales be true—but I never see such a set as these here."

"Good morning, Mrs. Crust—as I find you have no time to work, I shall send for my linen, and try to find some more industrious person."

In times of yore the village of Brampton would seem to have been a favourite resort of the gentry from London, which great city is not far distant from it. Many handsome seats adorn the neighbourhood, and there still remains a row of houses on the bank of the river, of a superior order to those in the im-

mediate village, forming what is called “the Mall.” These houses, belonging almost exclusively to three ancient spinsters, whose employment for life has been to furnish them as ill, and to let them as well, as they can. It follows, that in course of time, wear and tear, &c., the greater portion of these houses have fallen from whatever original neatness they may have possessed, into a comparatively ruinous and threadbare appearance, and can now boast of little to tempt the invalid or the “rusticating” citizen. The consequences may be imagined ; the houses are untenanted, creating a sensation of melancholy on passing this (perhaps once gay) Mall—with its empty and dilapidated mansions ; where, “This house to let,” “To be let furnished,” “To let, or the lease to be sold,” meets the eye at every step—and mine were always so perverse, that they refused to fix themselves on the river, where something more cheerful might happen to be seen, or perhaps I persisted in indulging a faint and unreasonable hope of there being one bill fewer than when I last had walked that way.

About the centre of “the Mall,” and overlooking a long string of tenements on the right

and left wing, within speedy reach of all applicants, and on the perpetual look-out for tenants, reside the three spinster sisters aforesaid ; who, by virtue of their professed vocation, feel themselves justified in noting, from their observatory, not only every passing stranger, but every movement of the whole community of Brampton.

Doubtless, the state of excitement in which a person lives, who, like a spider ensconced behind his web, is liable to a visitor in every passing fly, and whose support, indeed, depends on these pop visits, has its recommendations, and may be the reason why the three Miss Wigginses have never found time to change their state of trebly single blessedness.

What their personal charms may have been, the oldest inhabitant of Brampton is incompetent to declare.

Miss Wiggins, I should be disposed to guess, had never been connubially given—her very heart and soul are devoted to house and lodging letting. The second, Miss Peggy Wiggins, who leads a somewhat less active life than her bustling sister, and consequently has some leisure for reflection, asserts that she was once

on the point of marriage—but whether the point, or the expected bridegroom, were too sharp for her, does not appear. Miss Sally Wiggins, the youngest, or rather the least old of the Wigginses, “enjoys,” as Mrs. Brewster, of the Full Moon, expresses it, a very bad state of health. She never leaves her room, but receives visitors, and is the centre of attraction; the general receiver of every kind of news, real, scandalous, or conjectural, from every inhabitant of Brampton.

The mind of Miss Peggy Wiggins is less capacious, and confines its observations to the probabilities and possibilities of all and every the matches to be made, expected, or dissolved, within a circuit of twenty miles. Towards this peculiar branch of research, Miss Peggy has probably inclined in consequence of the occurrence in her early life, already mentioned, which produces a certain tinting of events, and occasional conglomeration of ideas, that leads to some whimsical quid pro quo in the emporium of Miss Sally’s chamber. Thus it comes to pass, that, after an industrious excursion, the result of Miss Peggy’s gleanings are often so mystified by a cloud of remi-

niscent reflections between the Village and the Mall, it requires the utmost ingenuity of Miss Sally to detect, with satisfactory exactitude, what happy couple have last fought single-handed through the main street of Brampton—whose cow it really is that has calved—and the precise shape and colour of Mrs. Thistleton's new bonnet. It is, however, an undoubted fact, that a perfectly idle person may derive considerable amusement and information in the course of a morning visit at the Wigginses. Those Venetian blinds of theirs ! set to so precise an angle, that no earthly thing passing can escape their ever-vigilant eyes ; while, from the peculiar gloom of the parlour they enscreen, no outward eye can detect their whereabouts ! Truly may the Wigginses exclaim, “Our blinds to us a kingdom are !” By these means do Misses Peggy and Sally inform themselves of all that takes place in their parishes of Brampton, Kingsmead, Upton, and Rushyhollow ; and by these and other sources, dependent on more locomotive propensities, does Miss Wiggins qualify herself to certify to all whom it may (not) concern, the various transactions, past,

present, and future, of the four parishes above mentioned. They have nephews, these Wigginses, some of whom rejoice in the same classical cognomen ; others, again, in that of Thompson, Jackson, and so on, and appear to be orphans.

I have every reason to believe the Wigginses were satisfied with the table I kept, during my stay at Brampton, as they never (at least to me) objected to my arrangements in this particular. It is not to be supposed my dinner could be the only one in the Village, the component parts of which these good damsels were unacquainted with. I felt the greater satisfaction, therefore, in this circumstance, on account of its singularity. I frequently heard how the "poor Bensons" half starved themselves and servants ; how "the Snookses" lived away, in a state of scandalous extravagance ; that "the Browns" never had salmon, unless it cost three-and-sixpence a pound ; and, that Miss Smith dined three times a week on cold meat. The last named delinquent was not even visited by the Wigginses, for she was poorer than themselves. The Browns were admitted ; they gave parties. "The

Snookses courted—for their presents of fruit, game, &c., of which they were extremely liberal ; and the Bensons were “let in,” because they were tenants of the Wigginses.

A short quarter of a mile from “the Mall,” overlooking the long, irregular, and winding street called the Town of Brampton, on one hand, and, on the other, the green, and high road to London, stood the mansion of Mr. Slopall, the apothecary. A substantial brick building of three stories, “long, dull, and old,” (as Colman has it,) partially illuminated by means of many small, narrow windows, each most carefully bordered by an edging of stone, painted white : a neat portico, of the same material, adorned the entrance ; and, in the centre of its green door, a large and shining brass-plate, with the inscription, “Dr. Slopall,” in laconic dignity, formed a sort of key, or guide, to an erection of more humble pretensions, attached to the left wing of the dwelling-house ; the low, sloping roof of which latter edifice, and small side-door, decorated with the word “Surgery” in conspicuous characters, evinced that the Doctor compounded the drugs he administered. A window of considerably

larger dimensions than the rest, a something between a shop and a dairy, looking as if inclined to "sink the shop" in civility to the assumed M. D., was embellished by a few globular glass vessels, filled with the customary non-descript liquids of blue, yellow, and green, (which never fail to remind one of Miss Edgeworth's admirable story of "the purple Vase;") flanked on the right by a white perforated jar, bearing the legend "Leeches," and, on the left, by a similar vessel, whose motto was "Cupping." Thus publishing to the world the choice of evils to be obtained within. Various creeping plants were taught to embrace the exterior of this surgery, which seemed shrinking between modesty and necessity; like the decayed gentlewoman who, being forced for her livelihood to go about with muffins, used, in a very faint voice to ejaculate, "Muffins and Crumpets," adding, in a still more under tone, "I hope to goodness nobody hears me!"

Mr. (or, as he preferred being styled, Doctor) Slopall, had, in early life, found himself, by some chance of nature, accident, or whatever else it might be called, "particularly

successful" in a surgical case; and the knowledge, experience, or confidence then acquired, he turned to very good account, for he resolved, having found one good mode of treatment, to stick to it. And, as the fame of the first cure spread, it naturally brought other patients similarly afflicted; and this system was pursued, with, for some time, tolerable success.

Those medical professors who were comfortably provided with a diploma, asserted that Slopall was an ignorant quack, refused to meet him on consultations, and foretold that the public would in time discern the "humbug." The interim, however, was Slopall's harvest: patients poured in from all quarters. The title Doctor was mounted on the door, and Slopall began to take fees.

Nothing, perhaps, is more easily gulled than the said "Public," unless, indeed, it may be the "sick Public." It was rather unreasonable to expect that, because an obscure country apothecary had saved a man's leg, he should be equally skilful in all the varieties of cancer, gout, consumption, &c. &c. &c., more especially on discovering that one invariable mode of treatment was applied to such multifarious

diseases as were presented—but Slopall was self-confident, and, moreover, had the art of infusing a sufficient portion of the same comfortable unction into the minds of his patients. He soon began to feel the growing importance of his wondrous powers; had not leisure to go to London, as he would heretofore have gladly done, to feel a pulse; and required, not only that the sufferers should attend him at Brampton, but, in many instances, take up their abode there. This was a glorious period for the Wigginses; such house-hunting, such demand for lodgings, by high, low, and middling, that, at times, even some of the poorer sort were fain to establish themselves in the Village itself, spite of miserable accommodations, and every sort of privation and imposition. “The Mall,” to be sure, was always prescribed to those whose means of payment were quite satisfactory—some said, that Slopall and Miss Wiggins very well understood each other’s interest, and more thought that it would soon become an undivided one. For, as they sagely remarked, “the Doctor must have his reasons for filling the Mall houses in preference to all others; and, though he was a

bachelor, and must find the nice little hot suppers provided specially for his enjoyment at the Wigginses, very agreeable, and all that, still there must be something more in it."

The something more, however, soon became something less ; for the Doctor swelled so palpably in his own opinion, that he began to look higher in his matrimonial prospects, and gradually to discontinue his evening visits to the amiable Wigginses. Peggy felt distressed for her sister's disappointment, but could never bring that notable spinster into a state of mind to receive with thankfulness the sympathetic condolence she found herself so willing and qualified to offer. Their houses still let ; and the unceasing occupations, incumbent on a frequent change of tenants, were sufficiently fruitful in happiness to the phlegmatic Letty. There was perpetually some alteration of furniture requiring her superintendence : the white beds at No. 7 wanted washing, or, the curtains of No. 10 had to be dipped ; and we all know what an influx of stripping and ripping falls upon all economical housekeepers on these occasions. Thus it was, that when the sensitive Peggy, drawing

her chair close to the sofa on which Letty was seated, busily extricating curtain-rings from their attached loops—a moment which she, in her simplicity, considered favourable to the tender theme—when Peggy, I say, had taken up this position, and, with a prefatory “hem,” in gentle voice began—“Letty, I feel for you—I, who know so well”—she was cut short in her pathetics, by the astonished stare of Letty.

“Feel for me! why I rather like this employment—though, to be sure, it is fiddling work—and, as you say you do know how to do this, I was thinking if you would take it off my hands, I could step in to No. 10, and tack up the dimity valance of the best bed.”

“Ah, Letty, Letty; you will not understand me—I see you avoid speaking on the subject nearest your heart.”

“Not at all, my dear Peggy; but I really cannot understand what you are dreaming of this morning; only, if it’s a fit of sentimentals coming over you, I’d better take these rings off myself; for the mere sight of them will set you off into one of your heroics.”

“Letty, I do not deserve this harshness

from you : but only answer me one question.  
Do you think he has behaved well to you ? ”

“ Not amiss, I think : you know he takes it for six months certain ; which, at this time of the year, is something ; on my own terms ; and pays extra for linen and washing : certainly, I might as well have asked a guinea a week more, for he did not offer to propose any abatement. I suppose Slopall had—”

“ The perfidious wretch ! Now, my dear sister, you have named the man whose conduct has made my heart bleed for you. Think of the suppers—the civilities we have showered on him ; for I’m sure I felt bound to add my attractions to yours, on a point so naturally to be expected. Have we not all played cards with him, till our poor heads were ready to burst for want of sleep ? Did we not give to him the only good servant we ever had in our lives, as a sort of housekeeper, in the belief (at least, I’m sure that was my motive) that she would keep alive the interest so apparently gaining ground ? And now, to see you neglected in this way. Oh ! it is really too bad,” sobbed poor Peggy, applying her handkerchief to her streaming eyes.

"If that be all you are fretting about," replied Letty, "I wish you would just take this piece of tape—go up stairs, and measure me the length of the muslin blind in the China closet—I have just recollect ed, I promised the new people to put one up in theirs, which is the same size, you know—and they will be down to-night, most likely—the exact length, mind."

"What a wonderful woman my sister Letty is," exclaimed Miss Peggy, inwardly, as she left the room to execute her commission. "How resolved she is not to betray the sufferings of a wounded heart! had I possessed her command of feelings, I might have vanquished my early disappointment; nay, I might have married some other man; sometimes I almost regret having devoted the best years of my life—"

"Peggy! Peggy! what's the length of it?" shouted Letty's voice up the staircase.

"Bless me! Letty, how you startle me, by such questions—knowing my state of health, too—oh, dear, I beg your pardon—didn't I come up stairs for something—I can't think what it was—I was thinking, just then—"

“For goodness sake, stay there till you have finished thinking,” retorted Letty, whose plodding equanimity was not unfrequently disturbed by what she called “Peggy’s unaccountable, unpardonable stupidity.”

**CHAPTER II.****THE WAGER.**

“THIS can’t last for ever,” thought Slopall, one morning, as the door closed on one of his patients, who was evidently hastening after two others laid in the churchyard the week previous. “It cannot last for ever; people will begin to find out that I am not infallible. Let’s see, this is the third cancerous case I shall have lost in three months—after committing myself, too, as I did! pledging my very character on their recovery—and, then, their dying under one’s very eyes, as it were! Monstrous provoking! After all, this plan of fetching patients down here, has its disadvantages—most especially in doubtful cases—and

I am quite undecided as to the eligibility of a residence in London. There, at least, one's patients are buried quietly—the whole county does not ring with a person's little oversights. At all events, if I do not conclude to establish myself there, I will, in future, recommend London air to all cancerous subjects. It's odd, too, that I should be so unlucky with cancers, above all things; the moment when it occurred to me to venture upon applying to them my usual process, I fondly flattered myself was the most fortunate of my life; nay, I cannot, to this day, make out why cancers, in particular, should be so obstinate; or why they do not (occasionally, at least) give way to treatment which, in point of fact, does now and then answer with other diseases. It's a pleasant thing to see carriage after carriage drive to one's door, to have patients in a manner completely within our own jurisdiction. To be bowed to, and courted, by every inhabitant of the Village who has a room to let, and looks up for our recommendation and countenance. It's a pleasant, a very pleasant thing, to feel our word the law—to have no envious competitor at hand, pointing

out to disconsolate relatives and bereaved friends how differently matters might have terminated, had the Doctor luckily tried so and so. In London are many skilful, and, indeed, learned men—I should have no chance there. No: I believe I may just determine to play the game out here; and, if I can pick up some rich widow, I can then give it out that I have made a fortune by my profession, and retire to honourable leisure. Yes; this must be my plan," he inwardly repeated, "for (sighing, as he adjusted his lancets, and deposited the case in his pocket) this *can't* last for ever."

Rich widows, however, did not abound at Brampton; and even young ladies with tolerable portions were a very scarce commodity. Slopall ran over in his mind's eye all the eligible and ineligible parties within his cognizance, not failing, be it confessed, to experience divers twinges of conscience, (he tried to think it only his old enemy the gout,) as often as, in the excursive flights of his retrospective imaginings, memory presented, in stronger colours than were exactly agreeable to his wincing perception, what might almost be considered the claims of Miss Wiggins.

He had been attentive—he could not deny the fact even to his own mind—nay, his attentions had been founded on intentions—but that was at a time when his professional reputation was at its climax ; and, naturally enough forgetting the peculiar circumstances of his success, he blindly imagined it would last for ever. A vista of the Mall houses, filled by his patients, his tenants, had visited his thoughts by day and dreams by night. True, the view was encumbered, not embellished, by the group of ancient maidens incumbent on this otherwise “desirable property,” one of whom must be married, just for form’s sake.

Slopall cared little which of the three might select him, and was willing to have left that point entirely at the option of the ladies. During his probationary visits to the Wigginse, he had arrived at this conclusion—namely ; that the eldest would probably prove the least of a bore of the three. By reason of the activity of her mind and fingers, especially conducive to house-agency affairs, the multiplicity of which would inevitably relieve him from much of her society. Accordingly, to (we would say the fair Letitia, but that Letty

never had been fair) to Miss Wiggins, then, were his marked devoirs paid.

This, however, was at a period when patients had poured thickly upon him, and were, without difficulty, established on the Mall ; which houses, filled, offered a totally different aspect, to the Doctor's mental vision, to the same untenanted, and, nevertheless, tax - paying (mis - named) property. No prudent man could be expected to marry three old women, with twenty empty houses ! And Slopall, therefore, felt himself exonerated from the commission of what he persuaded himself would be an act of lunacy. The Village would talk, no doubt, but what mattered that ? was there one individual in it who spoke in praise of the rest ? had not Deeds, the lawyer, won a considerable wager on this very point of fact ?

Deeds, certainly, took up his position a little unfairly ; for, having, by nature of his profession, attained considerable insight into the petty bickerings and litigations of the inhabitants of Brampton, he was more than justly qualified to make the following proposal to his friend and client, Mr. Smirkwell, a London shopkeeper, a man who saw green grass three

times a year, and, on an unusually extended excursion to visit his friend Deeds, was moved to express the rapture of his admiration of rural felicity, in the admirable, though seldom used quotation—

—“ If there's peace to be found in this world,  
The 'art that is 'umble may 'ope for it 'ere.”

Deeds, who seldom asked company to dinner,—never, unless he had some private motive for doing so, proposed to Smirkwell that he should take a solitary ramble through the Village, under the character of a stranger in search of lodgings; that he should profess extreme nicety, and strictness of inquiry into the character of each and every Bramptonian: “and if,” said Deeds, “you, on your word of honour, can bring me intelligence of man, woman, or child, who do not either drink, fight, or thieve, these twenty sovereigns are yours. Should your research prove unsuccessful, I claim a like sum from you—you win your dinner, and I will pocket the loss, merely charging six and eightpence for your visit.”

Away went Smirkwell, in a most comfortable state of certainty as to the realization of his

twenty sovereigns—his mind's eye looking ardently forward to the triumphant mood in which he would return to Mrs. Smirkwell ; who had suffered her countenance to become somewhat overcast, on her husband's leaving home for what she termed “a day's hidle, hextravagance and hexpense, to the 'indrance of business, and 'urrying of herself in looking after hevery item.”

Such a capital story, too, as it would make for the club ! few would there be who could have any pretension to rival him, in so flourishing an account of mingled pleasure and profit.

“ You'll go straight past the Full Moon,” said Deeds ; “ keep to the left of the street, and, returning by the opposite side, you will come to the entrance of Love Lane ; turn down there, and it brings you out at the Mall. You may skip that, for it all belongs to one party, and you'll hear enough of her in the Village—don't omit the Green—and be sure to be with us by four o'clock.”

“ Never fear that,” replied Smirkwell : “ do you only have the sovereigns as ready as the dinner.”

He buttoned up his coat, seized his umbrella, (what Cockney ever travels without that appendage?) and set forth; resolved to conduct this affair with more than his usual portion of mercantile caution.

"Deeds told me to go *past* 'The Full Moon,'" thought he; "how do I know but he had his reasons for that? I will make it my *first* point of inquiry—these lawyers think themselves wondrous clever; but I fancy my friend Deeds will be out, in his calculations, this time."

Into the "Full Moon," accordingly stepped Mr. Smirkwell.

"Could I have a glass of mild ale, pray?" said he, addressing the portly John Brewster.

"Certainly, sir; step into the parlour, sir, pray;—Mrs. Brewster shall bring it to you."

"Servant, sir; fine day, sir: glass of ale, sir? Joseph, bring the biscuits:" and the ever-curtsying Mrs. Brewster placed the beverage on a table near the window.

"Very pleasant ale this, Mrs. Brewster—suppose its country-brewed."

"Thank you, sir; it's pretty good, I believe, for we brews it ourselves—there's no depen-

dence on the brewer's rubbish—they puts all kinds of pernicious delinquents in it."

"Ah! that's very pleasant—making it at home, I mean—one gets nothing genuine in London. I was thinking of coming down here for the summer—are there any lodgings to be had here about?"

"Why, sir, there's nothing else, as I may say, such as they are; and yet, as the saying is, there's not a place for a gentleman, like you, sir, (Smirkwell bowed,) fit to put his head in."

"I'm not particular, myself; that is, I'm very particular in some things; but if I find a house pleasantly situated, tolerably furnished, clean, and quiet, I should require little more; except, indeed, a good cook—that is indispensable."

Mrs. Brewster smiled. Her nose was not of a curling nature, or, doubtless, it would have upward turned, in sympathy with the hope-withering expression of her thin wide lips.

"If you're going through the Village, sir, you can judge for yourself—I'm sure I wish I knew of any thing likely to suit you—Slopall keeps them pretty well filled—for

people *must* go where he bids them. You'll find the furniture bad enough, sir, in all of them; and, as for cleanliness, there's not one *I* could sit down in—and such cooks! but, then, what can you expect from such drunken, idle hussies, as we have hereaway?"

"There are some houses on the Mall, I understand—surely, they are of a better order."

"Miss Wigginses—yes, sir—you can see them, to be sure; some of them, I believe, are patched up a little decently for the summer months; but, then, sir, you must mind how you strike your bargain, for Miss Wiggins would 'skin a flint,' as the saying is—the whole parish knows *that*. But you'd better look at them, sir. All I know is, we have had a gentleman here this fortnight, what has circumnavigated them all, and he declares he could not stay above three days in any of them."

"Then you, also, take lodgers, Mrs. Brewster."

"Why, sir, we do, and we do not, as I may say; it's what we don't perfess to do, for our business requires all our intention—but, still,

if gentlefolks doesn't find themselves eligible in the Village, we extricate to do the best we can for them."

"Perhaps you can accommodate me, then, if I find no private lodgings suitable?"

"We shall be very happy, sir; I'm sure we shan't disagree upon terms. If you just take a walk, sir, and look at them, I will guillotine you for coming back to me."

"Thank you, Mrs. Brewster; thank you. Good morning."

Now for the left hand side of the street, thought Smirkwell; and he had not proceeded many steps, before "Lodgings furnished" met his eye. In he went—found them dirty enough, in good truth, and more than dear enough. After making a few preliminary inquiries, he remarked, in a careless tone, "Mrs. Brewster recommended me to look at your lodgings."

"Indeed, sir! I suppose, then, she's full—for it's the first time I ever knew her to do such a thing—she's too greedy to get all she can for herself. Was she sober, sir, at the time?"

"Apparently so," replied the citizen; "how-

ever, I'll consider about the rooms, and call again, perhaps."

The next house was a baker's shop : here, thought Smirkwell, I have a better chance of impartial judgment—he walked in. "Nice looking bread, indeed ! I'll take a roll, if you please. I have been looking at apartments, next door, and, as I'm rather particular myself, I should wish to make a little inquiry, as to character, &c.—perhaps you could inform me, living so near, what sort of person Mrs. Stitchet is?"

"She's a dressmaker, I believe, sir ; but I do not know of any body she works for—I know little about my neighbours, indeed."

"A widow, I think ?"

"Very likely, sir ; she said so, when she first came to settle here."

"She appears to be a very quiet sort of person ?"

"You are a stranger here, sir, very likely—there's few in the place, single gentlemen in particular, that couldn't tell you more about Mrs. Stitchet than I can."

"Ah, indeed ! I'm sorry to hear this—but I see a bill in the window next you, on the other

side—you'll excuse the trouble I give you, but I'm rather particular myself."

"It would not be safe, at present, sir—there's an execution in the house; indeed, my husband put it in—for there was no catching the drunken blackguard who lives there."

"Are any of Miss Wiggins's houses to let?"

"Plenty, sir; and likely to remain so—she asks such rents, that no one intending to pay their way mostly take them—indeed, she and Doctor Slopall are the ruin of Brampton."

"How so? do they not provide customers for the tradespeople?"

"Pretty customers, indeed! If Miss Wiggins can get her rent, she cares not a straw, if her tenants decamp in our debt—and Slopall's not far behind her, in this respect—they're a proper pair."

"Your roll is a leetle bitter," remarked Smirkwell; and he proceeded.

Passing the "house of execution," he rapped smartly at that adjoining, where "Apartments genteely furnished" authorized the intrusion; little variation in the result ensued. On turning away, with the usual promise of "con-

sider of it," "call again," &c., he observed, "by the bye, you have a baker conveniently near, I see—and cleanly, I think."

"I do not know that they are dirty, sir, I'm sure; I see very little of my neighbours—what they put in their bread, besides flour, comes in tubs—here, sir, you can see it out of this window, standing in the yard—my husband thinks 'tis plaster of parish—and I shouldn't wonder, for they serves the work-house. It may be clean, for what I can tell. I never enters into conversation with Mrs. Hunt, either about her bread nor nothing else, for she's one of the foul-mouthedest—but, law, as I say, her spit's as good as another's spite—I bake my own."

"I'm early in the field, yet," was the consolatory inward reflection of Smirkwell, as he walked into the next house,—a shoemaker's shop.

"I have unluckily broken my shoe-string," said he; "could you supply me with a new one?"

"We're quite out in shoe-ribbon, sir—you'll not get any nearer than Kingsmeade."

"Bless me! that's a strange thing—are

there no other shops here, where such a trifle may be found?"

"Not any fit to use, sir; there's Miss Twillit, over the way—never keeps much stock—her business is in another way, (with a mysterious and expressive nod.) Turner, up the street, perhaps, may have it; but he's out, I know, and it's a chance if his wife's sober enough to measure it."

"I begin to feel less secure of my sovereigns than at setting out," muttered Smirkwell; "I'll not give it up, however:" and on and on he fagged, but not a solitary even negative virtue could he collect; he found himself at the entrance of Love Lane, and very near the limits of his examination—one cottage only remained to be surveyed, and this, in outward appearance, had really some attraction; a neat porch, a grass plot, (that *desideratum* in a Cockney's villa,) and a small flower-garden, composed its ornaments. Smirkwell searched for a bell. He found the dangling remains of one hanging useless, and innocent of alarm, by the gate, one hinge of which being off, he readily admitted himself; and, proceeding to the door, (against which his intentions were

comprised in a gentle tap,) he found he had inadvertently come within witness of a cabinet council, at once confidential and familiar ; and, with the exception of occasional breaks, proceeding from the squalling of three small children, he was unavoidably made the confidant of one of the family squabbles of the once pretty Mrs. Lambkin, and her ci-devant adoring husband.

“ What is to be done, I ask you ? ” screamed the Lambkin feminine ; “ there you sit, idling —you do not attempt to support your wife and family. Oh, that ever I should have been fool enough to believe in the reality of love and a cottage ! ”

“ You cannot regret the circumstance more than myself,” retorted the angry husband ; “ but they say it’s a long lane that has no turning—so, though this is *Love Lane*, we’ll hope.”

“ None of your sneers, you pitiful wretch ; if you had the spirit of a man, you would exert yourself in some way for our maintenance. Look at that Quack Slopall, how *he* thrives—look at every tradesman in the Village—don’t they get their bread, every one of them ? ”

"By imposition and thieving," retorted the husband.

"Look at every lodging house in the parish," continued the wife.

"Is it not all cheat, cheat, cheating?" said the husband; "how else could such a half-witted, double-faced creature as Deeds get his living here, but by scheming and—"

Smirkwell retired—he gained the road unnoticed—he was tired—he was hot—he was vexed—he was dusty.

As he entered the parlour of Deeds, that sagacious man of law came forward, rubbing his hands—an air of exultation was spread over his vapid countenance—"Back in excellent time for dinner, I see—how stands our wager?"

"For heaven's sake give me a morsel of dinner, and let me be off. No words, Deeds—my good Deeds—I feel unsafe under your roof—for think not, you escape your share of abuse from the slanderous tongues of the Bramptonians—I am most anxious to reach London with all convenient speed—here I dare not stay, for a man's character is his wealth, and his children's wealth. I should have returned to the 'Full

Moon' direct, and there waited for a coach passing through the Village, had I not been threatened with extermination by its loquacious landlady."

"But I have won the wager," said Deeds—"the twenty sovereigns are mine—remember that."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE STRANGER'S ARRIVAL.

DOCTOR SLOPALL, as we observed in the foregoing chapter, was callous to the “on dits” of Brampton. It was quite evident to this unworthy disciple of Esculapius, that, to the Wiggins’ match, so long contemplated, there were powerful objections.

The next subject for consideration, then, clearly was, “Where can I do better?” and this formed matter of much ruminations to Slopall.

The Thorndales were girls of good family; their father, a man of handsome fortune—but, again, six daughters had to draw their portions from it—and, even should the Doctor be accepted, it was not, in point of money, so brilliant a connexion as might possibly be made, if well and carefully weighed in all its bearings.

Miss Willoughby was believed to command ten thousand pounds. To be sure, she was verging towards the critical age of five-and-thirty. Slopall thought, with his pretensions he ought to look higher.

Miss Pendlebury—ah, a sweet girl—silent, unassuming, the very person to suit him. Money, too, she had—at least, the mother (with whom she lived) kept a handsome establishment, and was commonly called the rich Mrs. Pendlebury.

Now, it never once occurred to the Village Practitioner, that his offers could be declined, or that any younger, and more agreeable rival, might compete with him, when once he should have surmounted the difficulty of deciding on what fortunate damsel his selection should fall. So that, when at last the choice was decreed to alight on Miss Pendlebury, he considered there needed no farther anxiety, than to dress himself with more than his customary care, walk down to Pendlebury Hall, and declare his “intentions.”

Having finished his toilet entirely to his own satisfaction, nothing remained but to convey his hand and heart to the beautiful Miss Pen-

dlebury. In order to allow himself time to compose his mind for an opening speech, (for, much to his astonishment, he could not quite subdue certain qualms of nervousness, which, had he been a younger, or a more diffident man, he would have been enabled to account for;) he flung himself back in his easy chair, where he remained in silent cogitation for full ten minutes.

The direct road to Pendlebury Hall lay along the Mall, and across the fields; he, nevertheless, adopted the circuitous route of the High Street and Love Lane, saying to himself, he should thereby "avoid the dust." Far be it from me, to insinuate that a faint hope of some happy inspiration, arising from so apparently a propitious line of march, had influenced the Doctor's decision. Truth obliges me to declare, it was solely for the preservation of Day and Martin's polish, this loveless lane was chosen; for loveless it was, and ever had been.

From the name, the reader may probably picture a shady, meandering alley—too narrow for two persons to pass along—a one-and-a-half kind of path—not broad enough for two, yet too

broad for one; in fact, the very identification of the love lane of every other hamlet, town, or village, in England, yet will they not thereby have a clear conception of *my* love lane. No gentle undulating turnings and windings led the fond passengers to hope there would be (as they could see) no end to it. Its turns, three in number, were acutely angular; so that, a person was never secure from their solitude being suddenly broken in on. A high bank on one side, and a deep ditch on the other, containing a quantity of black stagnant water, thickly covered with duckweed in summer, left no space for two pre-occupied lovers to saunter carelessly along—the ever-present dangers of the ditch effectually silencing those murmuring sounds usually uttered on these excursive rambles—carefully must their steps be looked to, who ventured on penetrating the obscurities of Love Lane; and obtuse must their olfactory nerves be, who would willingly encounter its varied effluvia.

The first angle of the lane was reached by Slopall in perfect safety; he had placed his foot on the bank, for the purpose of removing, with his silk handkerchief, a small portion of dust

unavoidably collected in his passage through the High Street. At this moment he was startled by the plunge headforemost into the ditch of an immense Newfoundland dog, and, at the same instant, the cries of, "Hey, rat! Rover—seek him, Rover!" proceeded from a gentleman on the opposite side of the hedge, through which the dog had forced his way, in obedience to his master's instructions; and was now, to the dismay of Slopall, plunging and splashing about in the green element—now rising to shake off and bespatter the poor apothecary with the duckweed, and other small matters, by which he found himself encumbered, and again committing himself to the green-topped, black-bottomed ditch, with undiminished vigour.

"For God's sake, sir, call off your dog, whoever you are!" cried Slopall, nearly smothered with filth; when, to complete his mortification, he beheld the very pretty face of Miss Pendlebury peeping through the hedge, as she leaned on the arm of a tall, gentlemanly-looking young man, and laughing immoderately at the figure exhibited by her embryo lover.

"What is it? for patience sake, what can it be?" cried Miss Pendlebury.

"Jack in the Green, I should think, by the appearance," said her companion, too much diverted, to curb the gambols of his dog.

"I do think—yes, it is—it certainly is Slopall," whispered the lady; "oh, George, it's our apothecary!"

"Apothecary!" and "George!" muttered the discomfited Doctor. "Upon my word, I must find out who this tall youth, with his dog, may be, before I shall feel justified in proceeding with this affair;" in the mean time, being aware that he was not in a state for making a present effective appearance, he crouched still more closely to the hedge—hoping thus to escape complete detection.

The gentleman, however, no sooner learned from Miss Pendlebury, that it was really other than some mischievous, birds-nesting urchin, who had become the victim of Rover's sporting powers—than he immediately composed his features, sprang lightly over the bank, and, approaching Slopall,—with politeness and real commiseration apologized for the occurrence, and requested he might be

allowed to repair instantly to the Doctor's residence, for the purpose of despatching his servant with a cloak, by way of covering his retreat. "I know you will excuse me, for ten minutes, my dear Ellen," said he, addressing the young lady, who, in delicacy to Slopall's discomfiture, had remained in the adjoining field.

"Dear Ellen too! the jackanapes!" inwardly ejaculated the crest-fallen son of Galen,—"You're very good, Sir, I dare say, but I flatter myself," in an angry tone, "I can walk through the street of Brampton at any time, and under any circumstances, without the fear of encountering ridicule. But I warn you, Sir, not to allow your dog to molest me again."

Thus saying, the enraged Doctor strutted off. A warm bed, and an extra potation after dinner, did not entirely ameliorate the vexation he suffered. "George," and "dear Ellen," rang in his ears, as he uneasily turned from side to side. Resolving, however, to sift the business in the morning, he, at length fell asleep, dreamed the church-bells were pealing merrily; and on opening his eyes and ears, found such was the case. Moreover, there

appeared at his bed-side Abraham, (that useful appendage to the household, fulfilling the offices of footman, valet, gardener, surgery-sweeper, pounder, and errand boy :) or, as Tomkins the parish clerk, expressively styled him, "The Doctor's inside and outside man."

With the great pestle in one hand, and an unbrushed waistcoat in the other, approached Abraham, who, saluting his master with his usual question, of "Law Sir ! what do you think ?" was chilled by an ill-tempered scowl, and the reply, " Think, Sirrah ! What is it to you what I think ? and how dare you, Sir, wake me in this violent manner, prying into my thoughts."

" Only, Sir," responded Abraham in a subdued tone, " I thought you'd be so surprised. Don't you hear the bells, Sir ? Miss Pendlebury, Sir, is married this morning to Sir George Stanton. Look, Sir, they're just a coming out of church : you can see them from this window."

" Shut the window, and leave the room !" roared his exasperated master, at this demolition of his hopes on the blooming Miss Pendlebury. For some time after this defeat,

Slopall's designs in the matrimonial line were suffered to lie dormant. The Wiggins' claims were held in abeyance, with a private determination to quash them, should any other appear with superior advantages.

The usual civilities passed between the Wigginses and Slopall, and although Miss Peggy sighed and grumbled at the "scandalous procrastination" of the Doctor, yet prudential reasons were sufficiently powerful to prevent any of the spinsters from wishing to come to open war with the ideal lover, who was so provokingly "backward in coming forward."

Matters were in this state, when Slopall was one morning summoned to a visitor, (a patient as he imagined) who had been ushered by Abraham into the little back parlour, honoured by the name of "Study."

"Who is it, Abraham?"

"A strange lady, Sir: very genteel to look at."

"How did she come, in her own carriage?"

"A handsomish Barush, Sir: but somehow I suspicioos it's a job; the coachman have one of they greeny-brown long coats on."

"What did you say, Abraham? that I was engaged?"

"Yes, Sir, sure, as I always does: I said how there was only fifteen waiting to see you, Sir, so she would soon have an orderance; and I put her in the study, Sir, and told her the Dining-room and Drawing-room was quite full."

"Very good: reach me the newspaper off that table; put some coals on the fire. There, now you may go: and mind, every time I ring the bell, you open and shut the hall-door. When I ring thrice, you may bring the lady here."—

In the course of half an hour, the single and continuous peals of the bell being followed by a "triple-bob major:" the lady was beckoned from her gloomy retreat, where, in fact, she began to weary of looking from the window, (whence there was no view, being closely planted up with laurels,) to the grate, where asparagus tops usurped the place of fire. The examinations of two chairs and a small round oak table, the whole and sole companions of her solitude, had ceased to interest her, and she felt somewhat impatient of her probationary

imprisonment, enlivened only by the scudding up and down the stairs of Abraham, in his laborious exertions to prop up the sinking fame of his pompous master.

On entering the "deception parlour," (as Abraham persisted in pronouncing it,) the man of medicine was discovered, in a studious attitude. His person was arrayed in a flowered chintz dressing-gown, under which appeared a suit of glossy black, most carefully adjusted. The delicate whiteness of his linen, and the tie of his well-polished shoe; together with a neatly folded coat depending from a neighbouring chair, a hat and gloves, whose evident readiness gave token of the momentarily-to-be-expected assumption of their dignified owner, so soon as the dispersion of his numerous patients should enable the great man to shed his chrysalis-like chintz, and walk forth to visit those he had incapacitated from the powers of locomotion.

"Be seated, Madam: no, not there; face the light, if you please.—Complexion good—apparently healthy too. Your tongue, Madam,—a leetle foul, I suppose,—nothing uncommon here, Madam,—do not be alarmed, we shall

soon set you up. Now, Madam, of what do you principally complain?"

"Of being left for such an unconscionable time in that little dark den of yours; but, as you promise to 'set me up,' I forgive you that—and I am anxious to have your opinion—"

"Not so fast—not so fast, madam—you must first favour us with some little preliminary conversation, if you please—some circumstances, in order that we may understand your case, and consider it carefully, and in all its bearings."

"You are very kind, I'm sure, sir—I have been twice married, and am now a widow."

"Very good—very good—but, my dear madam, your appearance sufficiently guarantees your respectability, and all that sort of thing—what we wish to know is—"

"You shall know every thing," replied the gratified stranger. "My father was a merchant, of considerable wealth, in the city of Bristol; my mother—"

"They are both dead, no doubt, and have left their property, I hope, to a daughter so evidently qualified to apply it to the best of

purposes : proceed, madam, you interest me extremely.”

“ Ah, sir, would that your impressions were correct ! My father speculated deeply, became a bankrupt, and my—”

“ Poor man—sad thing, that,” interposed the Doctor ; “ but, madam, (looking at his watch,) I have many patients yet to see, this morning—I fear I must defer the pleasure of listening to the history of your family affairs, at this time. Let us proceed with the examination of the nature of your present sufferings. Allow me to feel your pulse.”

“ Your pardon, sir—I am in perfect health, thank God—but, having been a little unfortunate in both my husbands—whose decease leaves me with a moderate income, and two children—I am anxious to employ the wreck of my property in some way that shall support them and myself. Hearing of the extensive practice you have formed at Brampton, and of the deficiency of accommodation experienced in the paltry lodging-houses of the place—it occurred to me that a boarding house, if well conducted, and under your patronage—”

" Abraham ! Abraham ! where is that dolt ?  
Really, madam, I do not know what to say—  
on the instant—Abraham, do not admit any  
more patients this morning—I must com-  
mence my rounds. Excuse me, madam, what  
you have said I will turn over in my mind—  
Abraham, open the door. Good morning,  
madam ; perhaps you will oblige me by calling  
again, when your plans are fully digested."

" They are so now, sir—when I tell you I  
have fifteen thousand pounds to throw into the  
concern—for my first husband left me a hand-  
some fortune, though not equal, perhaps, to  
what I should have inherited, had he lived  
longer—that I have nearly concluded on taking  
the lease of that capital mansion, half a mile  
distant, High-hill-house—that I bring five  
boarders with me, who each pay me two  
hundred a year—you will probably be in-  
clined to give a longer consideration to my  
case ; which, if not a medical one, may still  
form a matter of interest to you, professionally  
considered. My connexions in London are  
very high—Lady Mary Wormwood lived three  
years with me : Sir Thomas Knightwell and  
his amiable lady are now under my roof ; she

is in delicate health, poor thing, and it is of importance to have a clever medical man within one's reach: the Hon. Mr.—”

“ Abraham!—a thousand pardons, dear madam. Will you allow me to order your carriage to put up for an hour? There's good stabling at the Full Moon. You will oblige me, I see. Abraham, shew the coachman the Full Moon—and, Abraham, step down to Mrs. Simpkins, say that I am particularly engaged, but will make her's the first visit—call at Miss Flutter's, ask what sort of a night she had—and, here, take this composing draught with you, I know she'll want it—you may just bring me word, if old Mrs. Dwindle is dead yet. If you meet any one coming for me, say I am engaged—particularly engaged, mind. And—Abraham—leave me the key of the sideboard, and tell Mrs. Bennett to send up some sandwiches, a cold chicken, or any little delicacy she may have in the house.”

“ I hope, my dear madam, to prevail on you so far, as to take some slight refreshment, after your drive; in the mean time, we will, if agreeable to you, resume the subject I was listening to, believe me, with the warmest

interest. High-hill-house, you say, you are thinking of—a most excellent mansion, indeed—elegantly, indeed splendidly, furnished—makes up fifteen beds. Are you quite aware of its contingent expenses? The grounds are considerable, requiring, at least, two gardeners; the rent, I know, is heavy, for the owner, who is gone to live in the next county, is not a man to give way an inch in his bargain. You are the best judge; but, really, I should say it will, perhaps, be a leetle too expensive an establishment."

"Expense, sir, is no object, in my eyes; I have been so long accustomed to this kind of an establishment, that I have no doubt, by the means I shall pursue, of rendering High-hill-house a very charming abode, with the select and accomplished society I can assemble there. The Rev. Dean of Dundee used to say, he never sat down to a better table than mine. Lord Maryton and the young Stanmores would often drop in to luncheon, when I lived in the neighbourhood of Brighton; and very charming—delightful parties, we used to make. My boarders generally keep each one or two saddle-horses; Miss Winterton has her own

close carriage and groom ; and I keep a barouche for the use of the house in general."

" You appear, indeed, to understand the method of doing things in a certain style," said Slopall : " may I ask, Have you quite fixed on High-hill-house ? A friend of mine, who owns several houses in Brampton, could, I believe, provide you one on much lower terms than this you contemplate."

" Miss Wiggins, I suspect—no, no ; none of her dilapidated dungeons for me—I have seen them, my good sir—one word like that suffices—no, I am determined to do every thing on a scale of magnificence and fashion. My connexions would not live on Brampton Mall. They are chiefly of the aristocracy, and must be accommodated accordingly."

Now, if Slopall had one wish paramount to all others, one unceasing desire haunting him day and night, it was,—that fate should bring within his reach a patient in that right honourable rank of life, in which his liberal-minded visitor appeared to move.

A floating, an intoxicating idea gained entrance to his mind. The realization of the ardent, though long-despaired of, desire of his

soul, appeared about to be accomplished through the medium of this interesting lady. He overpowered her with civilities, professions of service, and their apparently mutual enjoyment was only interrupted by the lady declaring that she must reluctantly terminate the present interview. The Honourable Miss Chatter and Lady Tandem, she recollects, were expected to dinner, and "coachman" would be wanted, as "unfortunately one of the other men was laid up with a sprained ankle." She promised however, soon to repeat her visit, and in the full confidence that, as she expressed it, they would "pull together," was handed and bowed to her carriage by the transported Slopall.

Here was a blow to the Wiggins' interest! What would these long-courted and consulted damsels say to such an innovation on their rights and privileges? Who could be stupid enough to occupy their tumble-down dwellings, with all their attendant expenses of house-keeping in so ill supplied a place as Brampton, when they might, at no essential difference in pocket, be lodged, fed, and served in a style of elegance and fashion,—introduced to the first society;

enjoying at the same time the united luxuries of bed, board, and amusements?

Yes, it would prove a death-blow to the Wigginses, there was no denying that. The brilliancy of the opening prospect so dazzled the eyes of our selfish Apothecary, that he at once consigned all his old professions of friendship, to "the tomb of all the Wigginses;" and Abraham was agreeably surprised, on coming abruptly into the room, to find the ill temper of the morning completely evanished, his master, with one leg still suspended in the performance of a caper, which, accompanied by the snapping of his finger and thumb, had embellished his eloquent ejaculation of

"A FIGGINS, FOR WIGGINS!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## MY RESIDENCE.

THE reader is by this time, it is hoped, sufficiently interested in the affairs of "my village," to listen with indulgence to the description of my own residence. Be it premised, that I took possession of it under the combined influence of sickness, and, I may say, a sort of nausea to London, in the aggregate; owing to a long and close confinement in one of the noisiest streets of that noisy city. An illness caused by over fatigue, and attention to an irksome and troublesome business, rendered "a quiet country residence" the first and ardent wish of a withered mind and body, and prepared me to read with elated hopes (how often, alas! to be crushed,) the flourish-

ing, tempting, and fallacious pictures, daily issuing from the "magazines," (nothing less can be the term,) of the various auctioneers who persist in misleading a suffering public to the inspection of their "unexceptionable," "valuable," "desirable," all but intolerable premises.

The advertisement which brought me to Brampton was seductively modest in its wording. I had been so often led astray by a promise of "charming prospects," "luxuriant shrubberies," and "magnificent pieces of water," that my eyes experienced a sensation of refreshment on the present occasion, where "a small, convenient villa, situated on the banks of the river, with gardens and detached offices," formed the extent of its professed advantages. To Brampton I drove, and presented my credentials, to view that messuage and estate known by the name of "Land-to-let Villa." A title conferred upon it, I was informed, in consequence of the great length of time, during which the whole and sole extent of its plantations (consisting of one long pole,) supported a square board with that concise inscription exhibited thereon. Some

hardy adventurer at length undertook the task of building on, and otherwise embellishing, the estate ; and the good people of Brampton—not altogether deficient in wit, (“of sorts,” as Theodore Hook has it,) so strongly opposed a second baptism, that the original name remained : exposed, when empty, to the jeers of its more fortunate neighbours ; and, even when tenanted, lying under the unpleasant imputation of misnomination. The “land” formed a nearly equilateral triangle, of about three acres, the western side of which lay close to the river ; the point, in which the two others met, was situated between the Village and the Mall, which point was that of entrance. Now, let no ignorant Londoner imagine that, although the house was, in reality, not more than a dozen yards from the great gates, (so named from the circumstance of a smaller one adjoining them, and appropriated to the thousand-and-one morning calls of butcher, baker, grocer, and other trades-people;) let no rash person imagine his lot would be to enter these gates and walk into the house, whose chimneys he beheld peeping over them, as speedily, and with as little form, as he would step into

the hall of his own residence. Far otherwise had been decreed by the landscape gardener, (no doubt such a professor was employed to *plan*, as it is called, the grounds;) the fundamental principle of whose art appears to be, that the longest possible tour of which capabilities allow, shall be comprehended between the entrance gates and the door of the mansion. The present was not an extensive field for the display of this practice. It was, therefore, resolved, in order to secure to all visitors the entire circuit of "the grounds," that the drive should diverge from the above-named point, and, pursuing as meandering a course as the limits permitted, arrive at length at the other side of the house; that the rather formally-shaped half heart of this "approach" should be balanced by its very ditto on the opposite, by which means, coachmen would naturally pursue their route on leaving the house, in preference to the alternative of turning round; and walking visitants, by this ingenious contrivance, obtained a certainty of meeting the extreme severity of either sun, wind, or rain, as the case might be, and from whatever point of the compass it came, during

their "forced march," as their walk might justly be called.

Often as I have felt angered by this abominable, impertinent, and inhospitable mode of admittance, I have figured to myself the astonishment that would be experienced, if we received a person in London, by the peremptory requisition to mount the staircase to the very attics, perform the grand tour of that interesting suite of chambers, with an assurance of admission to the parlour on descending from so disagreeable a task. But custom reconciles us to strange things; and there is nothing for it, but patient submission to its arbitrary laws.

The house itself was apparently a snug-enough abode, consisting of an upper and lower story, divided by a trellised veranda, covered with honeysuckle, jessamine, roses, and all and every the legitimate retreat of spiders, earwigs, &c. &c. It was spring—a fine day—and in its best looks was "Lantolet" villa, on my first inspection of its qualifications. My examination of the house proved tolerably satisfactory. No evidences appeared, to warn me that every one of the hitherto untried chim-

neys would smoke, or that the rain penetrated the ceiling of every bedroom—the same having rejoiced in a coat of whitewash since the last fit of bad weather. The lower offices appeared well arranged—how was I to guess that the river, at that moment low, and enjoying the tranquil delight of ebb-tide, would, during the winter, favour me with a periodical visit up to the third bar of that place of no sinecure, the kitchen range? Thus concluded my peregrinations within doors. I next accompanied my guide over the domain. The shrubberies (a pair of them, in every sense of the word,) led to the water-side, where I certainly did observe, and, in fact, remarked the same to my attendant, certain innumerable holes in the muddy bank, as plentiful, and nearly as regular, as the perforations in the honeycomb.

I had heard of rats—water rats—and hinted my suspicions as to there being a colony of those, not most desirable of neighbours, established here before me. I was assured that no such animal was to be found within ten miles of the spot; and, though unconvinced, I proceeded in my survey.

The kitchen-garden was compact, and

pretty well stocked ; its boundary, however, being next the village, I suggested the probability of the wall being rather of the lowest, more especially in fruit-time ; but the " defendant " appeared to feel himself personally implicated, in this disgraceful reflection on the honesty of the Bramptonians, and I could not help regretting I had so thoughtlessly committed this solecism in my manners, and concluded my excursive ramble, with the determination to take the place for better, for worse. The better lasted a full fortnight, when a heavy thunder-storm sent streams of water into every bed-room, and troops of undressed, screaming, and half-drowned servants out of them. My own dormitory being on the ground-floor, I escaped the wetting, and was discovered by the alarmed refugees engaged in a rather warm contest with a huge rat, who had placed his affections on my rush-light : my only weapon of defence the tongs, yet I came off victorious.

The shrieks of the domestics became still louder, on finding this second enemy ; and, as return to their beds was impossible while the storm continued, I desired the cook to light

the kitchen-fire, and endeavour to comfort us all by means of some tea. But scarcely had she departed on this mission, when a still louder scream reached our ears, together with the sound of some large substance falling with a heavy splash, apparently into water.

"I'm drownded! I'm drownded! now or never. Oh, murder!" and "help," proceeded from the half-stifled voice of poor cookey. I seized the rescued rush-light, and, followed by the terrified crew, explored my way to the lower regions, where a matter of "three feet water in the hold" accounted for the disaster of cook, who, in her surprise at feeling the "universal element," as it seemed to her, ascending in proportion as she descended, lost both presence of mind and her balance, and at the moment of my discovery was floating with her head "homeward bound," towards the great fish-kettle under the dresser.

"I must see Mr. Deeds the first thing in the morning," said I; "something strikes me, he has not been strictly sincere in the assurances he gave me of this place being in perfect repair." To Mr. Deeds I accordingly sent, requesting he would favour me with a visit at

his earliest convenience. If possible, to explain to me the cause of the uncomfortable and alarming manner in which we had passed the night.

Up came the attorney: concern and astonishment (I must say, very well expressed,) on his flexible countenance.

“A pretty state of things this, Mr. Deeds ! You have doubtless heard of the various amusements in which we have been engaged? What can be the reason of this inundation ?”

“I am distressed beyond measure, Madam, I cannot conceive : I really am at a loss to—through the roof your maids tell me the rain attacked them : some slate, I should rather imagine, must be loose ; we’ll see to it, Madam ; it shall be attended to immediately.”

But the rat ! Mr. Deeds ! how, in the name of wonder could that immense rat gain possession of my bed-room ?”

“A rat !” exclaimed the man of law, with an unexceptionable performance, consisting of up - lifted hands, and elevated eye-brows ! “A rat, Madam ! You astonish me beyond measure ; could it have come in any of the

hampers of wine? It must have come from town, I apprehend."

"I wish I could think so, Mr. Deeds: I fear it had a much shorter journey to perform, and, I suspect, preceded me as a tenant here. You recollect my pointing out to you those numerous holes by the river-side."

"Impossible, quite impossible, my good lady: I'll venture to stake my existence there's not—"

"Another,—Oh, Ma'am, there's another," screamed Betty, "Oh, gemini stars, he's runned under the sophy: oh, if ever I seed sich a place in my life. We shall all be devoured and conterminated if we stays here."

"I'll go down to the river, if you allow me," said Deeds: and if they really are rat-holes, we'll see into it, they shall be filled up; every thing shall be made good; the slater shall look at the roof, and—

"And who's to look at *my* kitchen?" inquired, in a sharp tone, the cook;" (the scene of general distress having congregated the entire household within the precincts of the parlour.) "What's to be done to my kitchen? that's what I wants to know?"

"Ah, by the bye, let me see : yes, they are spring-tides just now ; the water will rise a leetle, I dare say : it is not unusual at Brampton ; it merely proceeds from the spring-tides, which only prevail for about three days, once in the month."

"Do you mean me to understand, Sir, that we are to be subject to these inundations twice in twenty-four hours ! and for three days in every month ? I think I ought, at least, to have been informed of this !"

"Why, Madam, it is but neighbour-fare : every inhabitant of Brampton suffers, more or less, in this way. I really thought the fact had been too notorious to require my naming. Why, Madam, he ! he !—only last night, I happened to have dined with Dr. Sleek, our rector, we kept it up rather late ; he ! he ! and about midnight, a leetle before midnight, having occasion to send into the cellar for wine, the servant, being a new one, returned, saying, the approach was impossible ; and the reverend doctor was actually obliged to navigate the large tub, which is moored in the cellar for the purpose of attaining the desideratum in these contingencies ; he, he, he !!

"However, Madam, what can be done, shall be done. The necessary repairs shall be attended to immediately."

The terms of this "enviable property," comprised, its being held on agreement for the space of three years: all necessary repairs to be done by the landlord. Here then I was fixed, with no resource from my periodical water-parties, than their concomitant report to the slater; who, in trampling over the roof in search of one hole, seldom failed to make two, thus sowing the seeds of a job, to be reaped after the next shower. The rats we kept at bay, by means of good dogs: and in regard to the honesty of the Bramptonians, I can only say, that, up to the present moment I have never enjoyed the satisfaction of appropriating to my own use a single iota of the produce of my "well-stocked garden."

On naming this rather mortifying circumstance, (as I gently designated it,) to Mr. Deeds, he felt "inclined to apprehend the numerous bargemen passing up and down the river were more likely to be the delinquents." In fact, they were allowedly a lawless set of

men : and were on that account, (for I never could discover any other,) saddled with all the sins, great, small, and medium, of the liquor-loving, labour-hating community of Brampton.

By dint of dogs, lights, boats, and perpetually renewed caulkings, the winter slipped away, and spring brought forward whatever beauty nature had bestowed on "Land-to-let Villa."

Now commenced the period I calculated on for enjoying my rural retirement ; and really, if the world would have let me alone, I could have enjoyed it most entirely and rationally. I am not a querulous person, whatever the reader may think to the contrary. Having twice sustained the fatigues and cares of matrimony, and feeling quite relieved by the removal to a better place of both my husbands, neither of whom, let me add, were bad ones. Yet, to a person of my quiet temperament, a single life is, after all, the most to be coveted, and I thought to settle down unmolested in the country, for I am not without resources. There's knitting, and netting, and frilling, and flowering, and those kind of feminine occupations, quite suf-

ficient to one of my turn of mind. Nothing less than a series of persecutions could have tempted me to write a book. It was the only possible mode I considered likely to restore my temper to its original state of equanimity, which I own has been, in some degree, disturbed by the various sources of annoyance inseparable from my rural line of life. Merely in a medicinal point of view have I taken up my pen, and in the hope that by committing the history of Brampton to paper, the impression of its horrors may leave my mind. I am about to appear before the public, to receive, probably, its censure and abuse, to look with a painful anxiety for the appearance of the Literary Gazette and Quarterly Review: but as nothing can come in so homely a shape as the grievances to which my three years' banishment have subjected me, I shall, no doubt, have nerves to sustain the results. Relying on the truth of my portrait, I will content myself with saying to the incredulous, "Go, see, and believe :" to the abusive, "Go, and live there."

To proceed, then, with my summer-sufferings. I soon found that, owing to the numerous

kind friends, (who would have let me die very quietly in the city,) I was so beset with visits from hosts of smoke-dried Londoners, under the pretence of seeing how the country agreed with me, and who took advantage of every fine day, to bestow their tediousness on me, and to breathe “the fresh;” that the only moments, when I could hope to saunter alone through my grounds, were, when a set-in rain, or a heavy fog, rendered it less than human to take out a pair of horses. The distance was so convenient!—just a pleasant drive, giving themselves and horses time for rest and refreshment! Nay, the Philistines had sometimes the assurance to boast of their charitable motives, in thus quartering themselves and cattle upon me. “It must be such a relief to the monotony of my life,” forsooth; “and such a delight to see any one from London!”

Then the first thing, of course, was eating—after their drive, they really had quite gained appetites: next came the necessary additions to be provided for my originally simple dinner.

We all know that, when the different dispensers of supplies have made their morning

calls, and “taken orders,” all future arrangements must depend on sending for reinforcements.

This, if occurring once-in-a-way, one would expect the sulkiest of servants to bear; but when the same occurrence is of almost daily return, (or at all events expected to be so, which is just as bad,) the very sweetest of cooks is unequal to such a draft upon her temper. At Brampton, we were a mile distant from any eatable thing: and the “bargemen” (these thieves of bargemen!) did not leave us the resource of a dish of peas to be served in a hurry, as companion to a ham, or such like thing.

A course of mutual apology consequently took place, on the relative inconvenience of short commons and long appetites: which ended in the entire clearance of the table. The hastened coffee being despatched, giving token of my being eaten out of house and home; they would begin to “fear it was getting late,” “time to be thinking,” &c.—and in return for all the trouble they had caused myself and household, if it chanced that a day’s shopping in town led me to call on these

cormorants, they had not the civility to offer me even a sandwich.

But this was trifling, compared to sundry inflictions—I tremble even now, when memory tends that way. Of all that can be imagined most distant or slight, in the shape of connexions or acquaintances—all that had, and all that had not claims—none seemed willing to forget their “very intimate” friend at Brampton. And, as this formed naturally a heterogeneous assemblage, the effect may be conceived to have been not unfrequently most provokingly perplexing. Our overflows of the winter were a mere joke, in comparison; the spring-tides were perfect Chesterfields, when held in the balance,—besides which, we could calculate pretty accurately on the period and length of their visits. Whereas, it frequently occurred that those that one really did wish to see, were smothered in a mass of “bores,” that might as well, and better, have been at the bottom of the sea. Add to this, it invariably happened that the individuals one most ardently desired safely housed in their own homes, were precisely those who dropped down in some stage; thinking little, and

caring less, as to the mode of their return—an interesting state of uncertainty, not unfrequently enhanced by the setting in of a complete wet evening. There was the choice of two evils, either to confess to the fact of a spare bed, or, to station at the "great gates" one of the already tired servants, there to watch, (not more intently than did my ears,) for the approach of the few passing stages. Your hopes, momentarily raised, only to be dashed to the ground by the reiterated monosyllable "full."

Cloaks, shawls, and umbrellas were for ever in requisition. The very slight chances of seeing any of which again, weighed lightly against the resource they not unfrequently offered, of clearing the house: and I adopted a plan, for which I gave myself great credit. A large light closet was appointed receiver-general to a collection of the oldest, shabbiest, and cheapest wraps, dreadnoughts, hoods, and umbrellas, to be picked up from their various receptacles in London: and the consolation I derived in reflecting on my hoarded treasures, as I watched the white,

powder-puffy clouds collecting in the grey sky, I leave those to judge of, who have ever enjoyed the delights and comforts of residing at "a convenient distance from London." In London, at least, you are sheltered from intrusion until the clock has chimed two; there also, the distinction of single taps and thundering peals sufficiently indicate the style of applicant: unlike the monotonous mode of attack to be made on "the gate bell," which, whether besieged by the butcher-boy, or a barouche full of resolute citizens all agog for a holiday, remained a question of intense anxiety during those painful moments of suspense supposed to be occupied by the approach of the invaders. Here, alas! was no precise hour when etiquette should prescribe the allowed period of appearance. No security could be indulged (as in dear London) that the morning hours were sacred, excepting to those "officers" appointed to victual the garrison. The pull at ten o'clock might emanate from the purple digits of the fishmonger: but it was equally probable it should proceed from a detachment

of affectionate creatures, "determined (as they declared) to take me by surprise, and to have a long day."

Who is there, that circumstances have not, at some never-to-be-forgotten period of their lives, qualified to commiserate the sufferings of my fainting heart, as I rose to "welcome" my unexpected visitors? My first glance (for I like to face evils courageously) was to the French clock on the mantel-piece, from whence I derived the means of rapidly calculating on the number of hours I must appropriate to the catering for the minds and bodies of my "enemies," as I could not but consider them.

It is true, "not at home" might have been said; the very plan of the grounds, and of which at first I did not perceive the utility, favoured such a resource, by giving ample time for retiring out of sight. But complete escape was out of the question, for permission was requested to see the place, or to rest the horses, to escape an expected thunder-storm, or, worse than all these, to await my return.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE DEATH-BED OF JACK STUBBS.

I WAS sitting one morning, reading the last new novel, in a luxurious dishabille, and in a feet-upon-fenderish state of enjoyment, when I was told that Molly Stubbs begged to speak to me.

“ Let her come in.—Well, Molly, you want to see me ? ”

“ It’s on account of my poor husband, Misses—he’s dying, you see—”

“ Ah ! indeed ! I had not heard of his illness.”

“ Oh, Misses, he’s been laid up these eight days—he has not done a day’s work these three months—and Slopall, Doctor Slopall, (correcting herself,) says he can’t last many

hours—and I'm in the greatest of distress, Misses—the parish don't allow me only a quartern loaf and a mite o' tea and sugar, and he fancies sometimes one thing, sometimes another—if it wouldn't be troubling you too much, Ma'am, just to speak to Deeds (Mr. Deeds) to let me have the allowance in money, onstill to giving it me in what he can't eat now, poor fellow. And Jack bid me ask you, misses, would you give him a little wine—you'd often been good to him, he said—and Slopall (Dr. Slopall) allowed him to have some wine, if he could get it."

" You shall have some wine for your husband, Molly ; and I'll come and see him, in the course of the day. If I can do any thing with Mr. Deeds, in your favour, you may be sure I will ; but I fear it is unlikely he will alter the usual course of distributing the parish allowance."

" Oh, Misses ! he's as hard as the church-door, and harder, is Deeds, (Mr. Deeds;) but a word from you, perhaps, would mollify him. My poor husband frets, too, for he happened to make use of a bad word, and some of the neighbours carried it up to Dr. Sleek, the

rector, and he came down and talked to Jack very serious, and sent the curate to read to him, and prepare him to die, as he told him he was so near his time, and had not led the best of lives—indeed, I know we have both been in fault; and, between you and me, Misses, I am a little indicted to liquor, at times—but it's the trouble I've gone through—and what occasion now for Mrs. Meddle'em, as lives up our court, to go and mischify a-telling Dr. Sleek of it—and how Jack and I used to fight and that—I'm sure, if we did, 'twas no more than our neighbours do every day—and I can take all that's good to witness, Jack and I never lifted our fistes again each other, when we were sober."

"That, I fear, has not been so often as it should have been—however, do not stay away from your husband—in his present state he requires all your care."

"Oh, Misses, he's agoing as fast as he can—he's quite reconciled to go now—and he's given himself quite to God, Misses, for the curate told him he should expect every moment to be his last."

"Then, pray do not linger here, Molly—

you must be wanted to attend him—I will come and see if I can do any thing for him."

In the afternoon I set out to pay my promised visit. Jack Stubbs was not unknown to me, as a workman; but I had never happened to enter the miserable dwelling which now contained the dying man. A court, formed by some half dozen houses, was soon pointed out to me, as the last haven of poor Jack; and I had no difficulty in effecting an entrance to his dwelling, as the door stood ajar, and admitted me into a small kitchen—sadly deficient in furniture, or the commonest necessities of life. A few broken plates were ranged on two shelves; a saucepan with broth stood in hopeless chilliness on the ashy remains of a fire, which resisted all the efforts of Molly to produce one spark of warmth.

"If they'd give us coals," murmured Molly, "instead of that great loaf standing there, Misses, that he can't eat, nor me either, I might warm this drop of broth Mrs. Barnard sent him—I'm sure I don't eat an ounce of bread in a week, the best of times—what should I do with that great loaf every week? —but, please to go up, Misses, he's wearying

to see you ever since I told him you would come."

I ascended the spiral staircase leading from a corner of the kitchen, and entered the doorless chamber above. Those only who visit the sick poor, can form an idea of the state of destitution in which the suffering creature lay. Probably, a bedstead and its scanty equipments had been all the apartment originally could have boasted of; but even these were diminished, to supply the growing wants of illness; and, in proportion as increased weakness called for fresh alleviations, the very bed-clothes had been parted with, until, one of the thinnest of worsted rugs was the only covering left to poor Jack. The halves of two chairs stood on each side of a crazed bedstead, the want of whose fourth foot was supplied by a few pieces of broken tiles, so as to restore the frame to something approaching its original level. Of the chairs, one only had the seat remaining, which was occupied by a cracked cup or two, containing the unpalatable drinks poor Molly could provide for the patient, whose moans, on my entering the room, became less frequent, as he attempted to apolo-

gize for the desolation with which he was surrounded.

"It's not a fit place, Ma'am, for you to come to—but God bless you for coming—I'm dying, my good lady—and my poor wife is almost fagged out with nursing, and want of sleep. She has taken *the sheet* off, to wash it—but I'm going to be shaved, and have it on, to-morrow—I'd wish to be decent, to the last; but what can poor people do, when sickness comes? Dr. Sleek has been here, Ma'am—he tells me I'm dying, and I know it. I've not led the best of lives, Misses—but God will forgive me, I hope—I have never injured any so much as myself—ah! if my time was to come again, I think I'd be a wiser man—but I've been a lost brand from the beginning:—mother died when I was three years old—and father ran away, leaving five of us in the streets; so we was took to the workhouse, and, when the war broke out, I was sent to sea—I served in the navy eighteen years, and, when the peace came, was turned adrift—what could I do? I'd learned no trade, so I just worked at any rough job I could get, now and again—but, then, there was the mates I

worked with, careless, drinking chaps ; every night they spent at the public house, and if you didn't join them, and do the same, why, you was no man—and I think that's the way I got this cough I've now had five years, that's taking me home."

" You have passed a laborious life, I believe Jack, and it is a pity you had not resolution enough to abstain from liquor : but it is of no use to remind you of that now. You say you are aware that death is approaching, so the best thing you can do is, to compose your mind, trusting in the mercy of God to forgive your transgressions. Would you like me to read prayers to you ?"

" Thank you, Ma'am, I'd be grateful ; I can't read myself, but I'd be glad to hear them. The curate was reading to me yesterday, and he sent me some broth and some barley-water ; he's very good to me."

This little service, I fear, was not performed in a very impressive manner ; or, perhaps, the soil might be somewhat barren, to which I endeavoured to instil consolation : for, on concluding, I closed the book, inquiring if he had derived any comfort from what I had read.

"Yes, Misses, you're very good : but what lays on my mind most, is, to think the neighbours should be so ill-natured ; they went and told round the village, that I drank two quarts of ale last Tuesday : and, if you'll believe me, Misses, as I lie here upon my death-bed—"

"Never mind what they might say,—do not disturb yourself at such a time as this, by thoughts of your neighbours, but employ the few days allowed you, in repenting of the sins you have really committed."

"Ah, Ma'am, but it's very hard they should try, to the last, to turn them that's willing to be a friend, away from us : and says I have money hoarded by, and have no right to the parish allowance, God help me ! where would the likes of me get money to hoard away, that never had a halfpenny but just from hand to mouth ?—and, more than that, they says—"

"And Deeds (Mr. Deeds) the overseer," chimed in Molly, "Oh, he's a hard-hearted man,—says he to me, when I went to ask for parish relief,

"'Want!'" says he: "'what business have you or any of the poor to want, if you were to do as I advise you ; and put your money in

the savings-banks ?' says he,—‘havn’t I ’stab-  
lished it on purpose for your comfort and  
'commmodation,' says he : ‘and, don’t I attend  
every Saturday evening myself, to see that the  
money deposited is properly taken care of ?  
The bank,’ says he, ‘has been open three years.  
Now, Mrs. Stubbs,’ he says, ‘if you’d only  
placed half-a-crown there weekly : see how  
useful,’ he says, ‘it ’ud a been to you now ;  
indeed, we receive as low as a shilling,’ he  
says, ‘so there’s no excuse at all for you.’  
Now, Ma’am, I only ask you how it could be  
possible for we to do any such thing as he talked  
of, when I never scarce so much as see to put by  
a bit of silver bigger than sixpence at a time ?  
And how is a poor body to save, I wonder,  
that don’t earn above eighteen-pence a day, and  
has to pay house-rent and firing, and every  
thing, and get a bit of vittals ?”

“ It does seem a little unreasonable, I allow,  
Molly : yet I think you owned to me, not long  
since, you frequently indulged yourself in  
drinking more than is good for you. Let me  
advise you to check this bad habit before it  
becomes too strong for you to master. Let  
the state your husband lies in prove a warning

to you to avoid the like death: for you both know very well you have lived almost entirely upon gin: and, that it is owing to such pernicious practices, poor Jack is reduced to this situation in the prime of life.

“It’s true, Misses, we can’t deny but we’ve both done as you say: but only consider Misses, a poor man brings home, perhaps, eighteen-pence for his day’s work, and that may-be three times a week, and, supposing we laid it out in bread and cheese, how far would it go? and a drop of beer to it. As for meat, look at a pound a meat, what is it for two hungry people?”

“Bacon and potatoes, Molly, would come more probably within your reach.”

“They would—than fresh meat,—but what would they cost by the time fire for cooking them was added. Many’s the poor man, after taking a pint, which perhaps he can’t always help, (at the public-house,) brings home twelve or fourteen pence to his wife and six or eight children, and not a mite of firing in the house. Ain’t it natural, Misses, for us to fly to gin? there it is, ready-cooked, as you may say, and if it don’t feed us, it warms, and just puts

life into us from time to time. 'Tis easy for gentlefolks, that don't know what cold and hunger is, to talk to us about saving ; if they worked as hard as we do for a shilling, they'd know then what a little way it goes, to keep a family alive for a day, may-be."

"There is some truth, I believe, in what you say, Molly : and, perhaps, the only advice your well-wisher's can conscientiously give you, is to, at least, endeavour to lay something by for sickness, though it is certainly far less in your power than is generally believed."

Ten weary days and nights did poor Jack Stubbs linger, hoping and wishing, as did every one who saw him, for his release. My attempt to "mollify" Mr. Deeds, was a failure : "it was quite out of reason to expect that the poor should take such fancies, as to dictate to parish-officers the aliments proper or agreeable when in a dying state. If Mrs. Stubbs did not want the bread, she was at liberty to leave it for those who would be more grateful for it : the parish was over-run with reprobate wretches, who were perpetually dying, (so Mr. Deeds said,) and leaving not a fraction for funeral expenses." So

nothing remained but to contribute the trifling addition within my power towards smoothing the bed of pain. On the eleventh morning, I was rejoiced at receiving a message from Molly, importing that her husband had died at eight o'clock : and, as I had been so kind as to visit him when living, perhaps I should like to come and look at him. An assurance was added, that he " made a very comfortable corpse."

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE BARBER AND HIS WIFE.

THE barber, or, as he more courteously styled himself,—“ hair - dresser and perfumer,” of Brampton, was as completely the antipodes of Will Skinner, (Miss Mitford’s Will Skinner,) as can well be imagined. In his person short, yet active ; in dress, what my friend Galt would describe as “ prejinet ;” in manner, fawning even to fulsomeness. Idle, gossiping, and slanderous, as may be conceived, was Peter Fidkins. From the store-house of his memory might you collect all the affairs of every inhabitant of Brampton. Nay, turn you ever so deaf an ear while subjected to his operations, it was beyond the bounds of possibility to escape entirely the venomous drizzle not entirely to be frowned down.

His wife, poor woman! how I pitied Mrs. Fidkins; her humbled aspect, and subdued voice, too plainly betrayed the state of subjection in which her existence moved. The Fidkinses, (of course, as nearly all in Brampton did,) let lodgings, and, for a short time, a sick friend of mine occupied their "apartments." Here I sometimes saw, though seldom heard, poor Mrs. Fidkins, as she glided up and down the stairs, shrinking, as if to press through the very wall, if any one happened to meet her. She bore an evident consciousness of being clad below even her station: for Fidkins took the money—Fidkins waited on the lodgers—Fidkins kept the keys;—whatever might be wanted during his absence, must wait his re-appearance,—no power, no voice in the house, had Mrs. Fidkins. We use the term "hen-pecked" why not then "cock-pecked?" Mrs. Fidkins was most undoubtedly — most undeniably — "cock-pecked.—"

Every morning of his life did Fidkins attend the toilet of Doctor Slopall: by dint of lathering, shaving, and powdering that distinguished individual, his appearance was rendered, far

more imposing than his natural qualifications altogether justified. Once in the six weeks, or thereabouts, did Fidkins curl and “tity-vate” the three wigs, (or fronts, as they indulgently termed them,) of the three Miss Wiggenses. In short, all the awkward, or idle, or inquisitive members of this gossiping community, by turns came under the hands of Fidkins. What wonder then, considering the divers sources whence he drew his information,—what wonder is it, if he felt himself, “out and out,” the most sagacious man in all the parish; that he should expect all other tongues to maintain a respectful silence, when he hesitated not to say the case is “so and so,” in other words, to give to his listeners what he styled his “*ipsum dixum?*”

It so chanced that the shock-head of Abraham was submitted to the judgment of Fidkins the very evening on which “the lady’s” visit to his master had roused the surprise and dissatisfied curiosity of Abraham; who rested any way but easily, under the ignorance in which he seemed doomed to remain, as to the unusually powerful motive that could induce his cautious and parsimonious master to overstep

the bounds of his inhospitable habits, by ordering up a collation.

Abraham very naturally concluded his otherwise unsatisfactory conjectures, by arriving at the unquestionable decision, that what he could not penetrate, was doubtless clear as the day to Fidkins. So, as he finished his seventh cup of tea, he resolved to drop in at Fidkins's, and get his hair cut.

Now, while the cunning barber preserved an appearance of invariably giving, not gleaning news, yet was he nevertheless ever on the alert to admit new light as often as a fresh subject came within his reach. So it was, that Abraham was scarcely seated, (the first snip had not been performed,) when Fidkins began at once to sift the inside and outside attendant of Slopall.

"Any news, Mr. Fidkins?" inquired Abraham, in the most careless tone he could assume.

"News, Mister Abraham? why, really none, I believe, since I took your good housekeeper's,—Mrs. Bennet's, curls home, this morning: poor, good lady, she seemed quite flustered, the doctor having ordered up

luncheon for a lady who had paid him a very long visit, and yet did not appear to be a patient : but all this, of course, Mister Abraham, you know."

"I know I've never been so flabbergasted and gastrumfoo'd in my life, as I've been by my master this blessed day : first, I goes in, as usual, in the morning, to call him, and tell him about the gay wedding of Miss Pendlebury—"

"Yes, yes, a charming wedding really it was ; I saw them come out of church : Doctor Slopall was not there, I think ! wonder too, he shouldn't have been invited, attends the family and all—"

"Well, of all the passions ever a man was in, to be sure, was my master, when I only mentioned it : and how he might see the perception from the window ! Then, after a while, he gets him up, a little grumpy or so, but not much beyond his ordinar.—Well, by-and-bye comes a lady : he didn't know her, I'm sure of that,—I've my reasons for saying so, and she had her *permission* to him, and Master rings the bell, and orders me to let her out ; seeming quite in a hurry like,

to be rid of her. Down I goes, and stands with the door in my hand, when, hey ! cock-alorum-jig ! Master orders her horses to put up ; Mrs. Bennet to send up the best she could in a hurry : and there they sat condouging for an hour and a half, seeming almost as agreeable as courting. And when, at last, the lady did go, there was Master handing her fairly into the carriage, and skipping about all day after, like a parched pea.—”

“ Oh, some old friend, no doubt, Abraham : but she gave you her name, of course ? ”

“ No—nor who she is, I can’t perforate for the life of me.”

“ I think you said she came from London ? bless me ! how wonderful thick your hair is ! ”

“ It’s better to have thick hair than a thick head, he ! he ! ” grinned Abraham, as he committed what he considered so palpable a witticism.

“ Ha, ha, very true—very good, indeed—really, Mr. Abraham, you are so keen—but I wonder a man of your concentration did not examine the coachman.”

“ Never thought of that, till he was gone ;

and I might have done it so well, you know, while he baited."

"By the bye—yes—he stayed some time at the Full Moon, you know—or the Antelope, I forgot which."

"Two hours, altogether, if a minute—and I'll engage Mrs. Brewster would overwhelm his commission. Laws, have you done already, Mr. Fidkins?—you are so quick—I was agoing to ask you, if you could give me any conjugulars as to the quirks and vagaries my master has been in all day?"

"Another time, Mr. Abraham; I must run away now, for Miss Frizzletop is waiting for me to dress her hair; she is going to a dance, you know, at her aunt's, in London. Only threepence—good evening—to-morrow I'll let you into the secret, Abraham—good night—good night."

Having emptied and dismissed Abraham, away bustled Fidkins, on the instant, to the Full Moon.

"Servant, Mrs. Brewster—may I call for a pint of your home-brewed? I really am quite fagged, to-day; besides my usual customers for shaving and dressing, I have cut Mr.

Flogam's whole school, and am now going to dress Miss Frizzletop for a ball."

"Won't you step into the bar?" asked the loquacious Mrs. Brewster, who never repelled the universal newsmonger, until she had heard all he had to tell, and assured herself that he did not intend calling for more liquor. "Step into the bar, Mr. Fidkins; there's no fire in the parlour, and the air is chilly this evening. Miss Frizzletop going to a ball! Bless me, that's something more than common—where can she be going to a ball?"

"Her aunt, you know, in London. No, we've no such gaieties down here—ah, now I think of it, didn't I see her carriage at Slopall's door to-day? Not ill, I hope, or the dance will be put off."

"Mrs. Tomkison's carriage? No, I think not. Brewster! did you see Mrs. Tomkison's carriage at Slopall's to-day?"

"Mrs. Tomkison's?—no, that it wasn't, I know; for Abraham told me, the only visitor his master had, was she that sent here to put up."

"Ah, that was Mrs.—Mrs.—dear, that I should forget her name!" cried Fidkins.

"Stonecroft—Mrs. Stonecroft," interposed most seasonably Mrs. Brewster; "I had it from her coachman."

"Yes, yes—Stonecroft, to be sure. I shall forget my own name soon—but she did not come as a patient, you know, Mrs. Brewster."

"Well, so I jealoused, do you know, Mr. Fidkins, by what the servant actuated to me—she keeps a boarding house somewhere at the west end—where did the coachman say, Brewster? In Sackville-street, Piccadilly, it was—now I recollect."

"To be sure! I know the house as well as I know my own. The boarding house in Sackville-street—it used to be a very flourishing concern."

"So the coachman told me—but he thinks his mistress is going to move—for he has taken her to look at several houses, and, amongst the rest, to High-hill House, close by here. I was saying to Brewster, this afternoon, how would the Wigginses take it, if she were to fix her quarters so near them?"

"For my part, I am cautious of saying all I know," observed the barber; "but I cannot help thinking (it is between ourselves, you

know, Mrs. B.) that such a proceeding would be highly unpleasant to the old maids ; and, more particularly, if Dr. Slopall should recommend her house to his patients. You'll not mention what I have said—a man who sees so much into the families of Brampton as I do, must be very cautious how he conducts himself :" and off trotted Fidkins, leaving the host and hostess of the Full Moon to discover, or not, that he had, in fact, left their ideas very much as he had found them.

The following morning our barber recollect he had in his possession a front of flowing ringlets, which occasionally decorated the bald temples of Miss Peggy Wiggins. In fact, she had sent her Mercury, the lame cook, for it three several times ; each message specifying that Miss Peggy was in the greatest distress, and "must" have the front "immediately"—from the back of a dusty shelf it was now dragged, submitted to the influence (hear Truefit) of the curling-irons, and, with his pardon in his hand, forth sallied Fidkins to the Mall.

" So you have thought proper to bring

my front, have you, at last—really, Mr. Fidkins—”

“ I beg a thousand million pardons, Miss—but, actually, in the press of business—”

“ Now, do not talk such egregious nonsense, Fidkins,” cried the incensed Miss Peggy: “ do not I live at Brampton, and do I not know exactly what business you and every one else has ? ”

“ Very true, Miss—will you allow me to try it on ? I flatter myself it looks better than ever—oh, upon my word, Miss Peggy, but you havn’t a front becomes you like this. I’m sorry, indeed, I could not send it home yesterday, for Mrs. Stonecroft called on you, I dare say, and you would have liked—”

“ Who’s Mrs. Stonecroft ? —after a house is she ? —no, she never came here.”

“ Not exactly seeking a house—that is, not in Brampton. She is about taking High-hill House, a capital situation for such an establishment.”

“ Oh, a school, I suppose—ah, most likely she had heard we never let to schools.”

“ No, Miss, a boarding house, as I under-

stand—but I judged you would hear all about it from Dr. Slopall—she was three hours and a half with him yesterday, and I'm—”

“A boarding house—and within half a mile of us!” shrieked the horrified Miss Peggy. “Oh, Letty!—where's Letty? May Heaven be merciful to us all—where is my sister Letty?”

“What now? what ails you?—what has happened to Peggy, Fidkins?” exclaimed Miss Wiggins, rushing into the room.

“Really, ma'am, I'm very sorry—quite concerned. I'd no idea,” expostulated the barber, “I merely mentioned the report that's going about, of the new boarding house that's going to be opened at High-hill House—I'm sure I'd no thought of alarming—”

“New fiddlesticks, at High-hill House. I wonder, Fidkins, when you know the nervous state my poor sister is in, you should not have had more sense than to come here with your idle stories.”

“I beg pardon, I am sure, ma'am—it may, as you say, be all false—only, I thought Dr. Slopall wouldn't have given three hours and a half of his time, besides ordering a luncheon

of duck and green peas (Mrs. Bennet was all aghast) for the lady, unless there had been something in it particular—but you'll hear all the truth, I dare say, ma'am, from the Doctor himself.'

"There has been a lady with him, then, on the subject?"

"Yes, ma'am—Mrs. Stonecroft, of George's-street, Piccadilly—put up at the Full Moon—very handsome carriage, I hear—by what I can learn, she has made proposals to Dr. Slopall to attend the concern, on fundamental terms; so that, of course, it will be to his interest to comprehend the establishment to his own patients: indeed, it will be a great thing for the tradesmen in general; and I'm not surprised the Doctor should be so cock-a-hoop—you'll excuse the expression, Miss."

"You are a great fool, Fidkins—you know it, and all the parish knows it—because Dr. Slopall might indulge in a little condescending jocularity towards you, he is supposed to be lending himself to a scheme that, of course, would be any thing but desirable to Brampton. It is not at all probable that our old and very good friend would incline himself to a

plan that would certainly interfere with our interests. What should you know, Fidkins, of Dr. Slopall's intentions and feelings?"

"I can only tell you this, Miss Wiggins, and you may believe me or not—Dr. Slopall had, if I'm not mistaken, and I'm a man not likely to be, Miss—I see behind the scenes, Miss, in more families than one—a little bird told me that Dr. Slopall had a sneaking kindness for Miss Pendlebury herself. And I know, for certain, he was not invited to her wedding—and when his body servant, Abraham, only spoke of it this morning, he knocked him down, and kicked him out of the room; and, they do say, he was raving wild, like, and would taste neither bit nor sup, till this Mrs. Stonecroft came from London; and, ever since she has left him, he has been singing and capering about the house—gave Mrs. Bennet a sovereign, to buy her a cap—praised the luncheon being served so nice, and all that; and Abraham says he's an altered man since the lady went away—but you'll see the Doctor, most likely, this morning, Miss Wiggins. I'm very sorry, I'm sure, to have disturbed Miss Peggy."

"It's of no sort of consequence, Fidkins," said the nettled Miss Letty; "my sister Peggy's nerves are in that state, I dare say she scarcely knew what you were talking about. I shall inquire into the affair, however, though I do not think it extremely likely we should be the last persons to hear of such an event as this you speak of, had there been any foundation beyond mere gossip, for the report that has arisen. They are an idle, gossiping set in Brampton; and, to tell you the truth, it must be confirmed by Dr. Slopall's own lips, before I believe one syllable of it."

In saying this, Miss Wiggins's countenance was overspread by a smile, whose expression the little barber had frequently quailed under. It was a skilful mixture of envy, hatred, and malice, smoothed down by an incredulous sweetly-bitter, or rather, (for the bitter preponderated,) bitterly-sweet glance. Though evidently skin-deep,—few persons could, in one smile, so unite the various feelings of the mind; the upper part of the face frowned, most decidedly frowned, in open contradiction to the extension of lips, and other symptoms, generally expressive of some degree of plea-

sure. Fidkins knew the smile ; it was not the first time his confidential communications had been received in the like manner : he was not too stupid to understand that it said, “I hate and despise you, for the news you bring me ; but I’ll pretend neither to believe, nor to care, for that or for you.” The hatred, in this case, was mutual ; many were the petty ill offices each had to sustain from the other : and the man of soap-suds departed in high glee, at the discomposure he detected beneath the surface of Miss Wiggins’s affected indifference.

“I shall never teach you to have any command of yourself,” angrily began Letty, on the Wiggenses being left to themselves : “a pretty story now you have put in that blockhead’s mouth, by your credulous folly : instead of putting the best face on the matter—at all events, till we are sure of the truth—you begin screaming, and bewailing as a misfortune, what you are aware, if true, would be a source of rejoicing throughout the parish, not only as their own paltry interests are concerned, but in sheer spite towards us. It’s very provoking, that all my efforts to sustain appearances are

continually overturned by some blunder or other of yours. Could you not see the creature was literally choking with delight, at news he was sure would be unacceptable?—besides, a moment's reflection restored my self-possession; for, in the first place, I do not believe there is such a place as George's-street, Piccadilly, in London."

"Poor me," sighed Letty; "I'm always doing wrong—only think of your not believing Fidkins!—but, somehow, I was thinking of my front, at the time. What you say is very true, I dare say—I'm sure I never heard of George's-street, Piccadilly, in my life—I'll go over to Kingsmead, and look for it, in the library—I suppose it will be there—the Court Guide, I mean."

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA.

MANY and long were the cogitations of Slopall, as to, whether it would conduce most to his interest to encourage, or the reverse, the speculation of Mrs. Stonecroft. The subject presented many points of view, and Slopall was inclined to study it in all its bearings. The manners of Mrs. Stonecroft, (for such she had declared her name to be,) though unpolished, were still not devoid of attraction. She retained an appearance of some beauty, but that was the last consideration with Slopall.

Money, darling money, and patients of rank, were the advantages of most weight in his eyes. By his introduction to Mrs. Stonecroft's inmates, he felt almost certain of attaining the

latter; and so long, so ardently, had these desires taken complete possession of his sordid mind, that it would have been difficult to decide which of the two were most prominent. Fees had, latterly, dropped in less frequently than was either agreeable or convenient: what a restoration, then, of his drooping plumes would ensue, could he but be enabled to talk amongst his less dignified circle of—Lady this, and my Lord that;—to feel, perhaps, the pulse of even an Earl! Had fortune really in store for him this consummation of his fondest wishes?

But the Wigginses—his secession there would be a delicate and nervous affair, to manage with any chance of avoiding an open rupture: and the Doctor had not so entirely lost sight of prudence, as to be unconscious of the consequences which might ensue, supposing matters turned out other than successful, in the Stonecroft quarter. The lady had used a tone of unlimited confidence, in speaking of her different arrangements and intentions; but, (as he had somewhere read,) “All is not gold,” &c. His game, he thought, was certainly to play neuter, as far as pos-

sible ; and, with this determination, and as innocent an aspect as he could assume, did he wend his evening way to visit the weird sisters of the Mall.

On entering the parlour, where twilight added its gloom to the demi-jour systematically adopted there, he found only Miss Peggy ; who, poor thing, between her uncertainty as to the extent of truth to be allowed to Fidkins's story, her ignorance of the style of reception her sister intended bestowing on the suspected culprit, and her own conviction of his baseness, was utterly speechless. Approaching the sofa, whence agitation would not suffer her to rise, the apothecary endeavoured to enter into something like conversation. Fear of her sister, however, and horror at his late "base," though only partial, desertion, rendered poor Peggy dumb. The entrance of Miss Sally, on this occasion, was a welcome resource to the puzzled visitor. It was seldom, indeed, she graced the hall of audience ; but it so chanced, that this was what she called one "of her well days."

"I rejoice to see you down, Miss Sally : it leads me to hope, not only that you feel tole-

rably well, but that you may be tempted, with your sisters and myself, to play a rubber this evening."

"I really can't say how Letty is engaged," responded Miss Sally, who was evidently sharing in the ill-humour, or whatever it was, betrayed by Peggy: As to my being down stairs, I am sorry to say that it is no proof of amendment; indeed, I think that last prescription you wrote me was of no sort of service; I felt a little better this evening, it's true, but this pain in my head—"

Here, the seasonable entrance of the elder Wiggins relieved Slopall from the inflictions about to be endured, for the hundredth time, in the recapitulation of all the real, fancied, and expected pains, aches, and "symptoms;" that last word so useful, so treasured, and so indispensable, in the vocabulary of a professed invalid.

In sailed Miss Wiggins: a more than ordinary elevation of the head, a less than customary friendliness of approach, marked her whole manner, giving at once the cue to be followed by her ever-obedient sisters; and, to the Doctor, a pretty strong, and uncomfortable

impression, that something was amiss ; and that, probably, slander, with her thousand tongues, had failed not to carry, “gathering as she went,” the fact of his extended interview with Mrs. Stonecroft.

He was not long left in uncertainty, as to the cause of the general coolness by which he was surrounded. Miss Wiggins was too entirely, too exclusively, the woman of business, to possess a delicacy preventing her driving direct to the main point on which instruction might be essential to her. Leaving, therefore, unnoticed and unmeasured, the good man’s opening attempt of, “I was trying, Miss W.,” (abbreviations were not deemed inadmissible at Brampton :) “I was trying to persuade your sisters, here, to make up a rubber this—”

The half-offended damsel interposed, in not the softest strain ; “Doctor Slopall, my sisters and myself are feeling some degree of anxiety respecting a certain report we have heard, and which, perhaps, you may be enabled to guess my allusion to. You know, perfectly well, that it is not my method (unless, indeed, where a good tenant may be secured by it,) to beat

about and about the bush ; I therefore will confine myself to few words, and will merely require you to answer the following queries. The various sources whence I have obtained my information, are not allowed to obtain entire credit with me, until confirmed by your own admission. Did you, or did you not, Dr. Slopall, receive, by appointment, a lady yesterday, for the sole and professed purpose of lending your advice and assistance towards accomplishing the ruin,—the utter ruin, of Brampton ? Did you, or no, entertain the said lady with a collation, comprising chickens, ham, asparagus, your best, your choice, your hoarded West India preserves ? Am I to believe that any respectable female would enter your house alone, and remain in it for the space of five hours, eating, drinking—nay, there are those who go so far as to say ‘courting?’ That you should, on handing her to her carriage, have slipped into her coachman’s hand a half-sovereign, besides having ordered Mrs. Brewster to provide him the best he chose to call for ? Can it be possible, above all, that these, and similar acts of apparent insanity—such as, knocking out two of

Abraham's front teeth, threatening to throw him into the horsepond, and Fidkins out of the window, for their daring to mention in your hearing the marriage of Miss Pendlebury, (caused, as they assert, by your disappointed hopes in that quarter)? Can all, or any of these, and many more unaccountable actions, be explained in a satisfactory manner? and can they be either believed or justified?" continued the spinster, with additional vehemence; "in reference to, I must say, professions of regard to us and to our interests—what am I to think?"

"What is *she* to think?" whimpered Peggy.

"Aye, what are *we* to think?" grumbled the no less dissatisfied Sally.

The trio now remained in upright silence, awaiting the possible exculpation of the staggered apothecary. An attack like this, so violent, so organized, and so serious, he was unprepared for. Much that had been urged, though exaggerated, had truth for its foundation, and how to come off with untarnished colours was utterly incomprehensible to him. Retreat there was none; he would gladly have

crept (had it been possible) into one of his own pill-boxes, or have shared, with some two dozen leeches, their china dwelling.

Nothing remained for it but to brave out the scene as best he could: nay, come what might, a man was not to submit patiently to be lectured and browbeaten by three old women, to none of whom he was married. He determined then, since war appeared to be declared, that war they should have, and speedily. Assuming a lofty tone, he expressed his astonishment that his domestic or professional concerns should form a subject of such lively importance to "the ladies;" begged "just to hint," that he was in no way responsible to any inhabitant of Brampton, for his actions; "was pleased," he declared, they should compliment him by not only observing, but reporting, his movements. With regard to the visit of Mrs. Stonecroft to him, he had no doubt their excellent sources of information supplied them with even more than his own knowledge, as to how it might terminate. That his wish, his hope had been, that the friendship of so charming a woman would not have

excluded him from the long-enjoyed confidence and regard of the “present company.” Since such, however, appeared inevitable, from the light in which the ladies had chosen to view the exaggerated transaction of yesterday ; he had only to lament (and he did so, he assured them, with sincerity,) that their long acquaintance should be so unpleasantly broken up : and before his astounded auditors had recovered speech whereby to express their abhorrence of his matchless perfidy, baseness, and effrontery, the Doctor had bowed himself out, and was safely housed in his own “deception room.”

The blow was now struck, and decisively ; war, open and declared war, was inevitable. His cooler reflection failed not to point out that he had been a trifle rash in thus braving the vengeance of the trio ; yet, with the brilliant hopes before him, he could not altogether repent having thus abruptly put an end to an intimacy he had long found most irksome.

His way lay clearly before him ; to pay his earnest and undivided attention to Mrs. Stonecroft, in which pursuit he determined

to lose no time, but to call upon her in Sackville-street, the very next day.

The morning saw the Doctor adjusting with peculiar attention his best suit of sables ; and at the hour of propriety (that is, a quarter past two,) his gig drew up to the door of Mrs. Stonecroft's house.

" You'll just walk him about, Abraham ; or, stay, perhaps you may as well put up, and wait my coming to you at the stables, in Piccadilly ; I may be detained some time here."

Abraham grinned, and departed. The door was opened by a groom-like personage, who ushered the Doctor into a Drawing-room, showily, if not tastefully furnished ; where, full time having been allowed him to examine the different knick-knacks strewed over the apartment, and a tolerable sprinkling of titled visiting cards, which garnished the mantel-piece, the door opened, to admit the lady of the house.

Her present attire was not what the author of Pelham would term "recherchee." It appeared to have been assumed in some degree of haste, and with but little regard to general harmony of effect. The curls were

not arranged with sufficient care to conceal divers small square packages in blue paper peeping beneath and amongst them. The head was adorned by a cap, the profusion of pink and silver ribbons on which did not exactly justify its introduction so early in the day. A transparent dress of alternate amber and green stripes, led the eye to (I grieve while I write it) not only the unladylike attire of cotton stockings, but the cotton stockings evidently of yesterday; and shoes of black kid, edged and trimmed with blue ribbon, mischievously attracted notice in this fearful direction. Great part of the errors of this incongruous costume were veiled to the obtuse perception of the Doctor, who was sufficiently delighted at the friendly reception given to him by the wearer, to overlook such trifles as these, by which some fastidious persons please themselves in imagining they can discern evidences of character.

"This visit is kind, very kind of you, Dr. Slopall," ejaculated his hostess: "You are the very person I most wanted to see. I am overwhelmed with business of one kind or other, attendant on my removal."

" You have then decided on High-hill House, I may venture to hope ? "

" Yes, my good Sir ; " all is settled, " I take possession next week ; and you may imagine the fatigue of superintending such a removal as ours. What I am particularly desirous at this moment to learn from you is, the nature of supplies to be found at Brampton. The shops appeared to me but paltry, as I drove through the village. Will it be possible to keep a handsome table, without establishing some method of receiving provisions from London ? you are aware they must be unexceptionable in quality, and considerable in quantity."

" In Brampton itself, nothing whatever, suitable to such a household as yours, is to be expected ; but at Upton (within a mile,) or at Kingsmead, (our nearest town,) I have no doubt you would be served so satisfactorily as to obviate the trouble and expense of sending to London."

" That will be delightful ; and I must, at the first onset, request you, either to direct my choice of the different tradespeople, or kindly to accompany me in the little tour

I shall take amongst them, for the purpose of making the necessary arrangements, as soon as I am settled."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," replied the gratified Slopall, to whose interested vision a system of patronage was thus presented, which would draw still closer the trammels he had already exercised, in some degree, over the trading population, even to the extent of some dozen miles' circumference of Brampton.

"You'll dine with me, my dear Sir? I shall not have the pleasure of introducing you to Sir Thomas and Lady Knightwell; they are gone to Windsor for a week. Miss Winterton, too, is absent just now, and my three gentlemen have been good enough to make an excursion, by way of relieving my labours during the period of removal; but if you will partake of my solitary meal, I will hope, when settled at High-hill House, to invite you to a table more attractive in every way, than, in my present bustle, I can offer."

Slopall was not absolutely devoid of tact; he saw and felt the invitation was extracted,

not given, and declared it impossible to intrude on the valuable moments of Mrs. Stonecroft at such a time. It was agreed that an early summons from the lady should be attended with all alacrity by the obsequious Doctor; who departed fully satisfied that he had acted with consummate prudence and skill in thus securing the ear of Mrs. Stonecroft, and in some degree the direction of her household.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE STRANGER'S PROGRESS.

"So this widow is come!" exclaimed Miss Wiggins, on returning from one of her morning gleanings; "I just went down to Dale, the carpenter, to give him directions about the chintz furniture in Mrs. Pinchem's drawing-room. Tiresome woman! fancies it's dirty, and says I promised to have it cleaned before she took possession, and tells me of it every time we meet—so I suppose I must have it done. Dale, however, was gone, (sent for by Slopall, I hear,) to High-hill House, to put up window blinds; so I thought I would seek Betty Scrubbet, and, perhaps, she could manage to take them down for

unripping. Betty, however, is off to High-hill too. Very civil of Slopall, I must say, to take away our two best hands—but it seems this Mrs. Stonecroft is all in all with him now. I called at Tape's to match this fringe, and there, I heard, she had been taken yesterday by our good friend, as we *once* thought him, who gave Mrs. Tape a complete lecture as to the attention she was to pay to this 'Lady's' orders. I'm told he went to all his own trades-people with the same instructions—and as they are always ready enough to run after new customers, we shall be lucky, I take it, if we get a thing we want. Such running and driving—all to High-hill House. I met Cinnamon with a huge parcel of groceries under his arm. I verily believe it was the man's intention to have passed me without so much as touching his hat; but I stopped him in his gallop, to inquire why he had not sent the sugar I ordered on Friday, and what do you—what *can* you imagine was the answer of the impudent wretch? 'That really he had been so hurried making up the different articles Mrs. Stonecroft required for immediate demand, that *our* half-

pound of sugar had slipped his memory—he was going up to the house? The house, too! ‘to take orders for the regular weekly supplies;’ at the same time carefully displaying the bulk of the ‘temporary’ demand, by shifting it, as if for relief, from one arm to the other. He would attend to my wants as soon as he possibly could—and he actually ran off without staying to finish his sentence.”

“Mrs. Whine is here,” interposed Miss Peggy, “I declare I am quite disgusted by all she has been telling me of that man’s abominable perfidiousness, (Slopall I mean:) great part of what she related she was eye-witness of, for she happened to be resting herself in the Library at Kingsmead, when Mrs. Stonecroft and her new friend entered the shop. Mrs. Whine says she is not sure he even bowed to her, so devoted was he in his attentions to the lady.”

“Desiring Mrs. Cards to produce her subscription book, he said, ‘I have brought you an excellent customer, Mrs. Cards, who is willing to accept my recommendation of your library, and will do you the favour to enter her name for

a half-yearly subscription. It is my particular request that all orders from High-hill House, respecting the supply of books, newspapers, &c., may meet with the most punctual and speedy execution, and it is possible you may thereby secure the patronage of the different members of the nobility and gentry residing with Mrs. Stonecroft.' Away they sailed—he handing her out with 'all his manners ;' and Mrs. Cards declared he looked so puffed out and awful-like, she had not courage to say a word about the two guineas that ought, you know, to have been paid down."

"Hum," escaped in an under tone from the closed lips of the elder Wiggins.

"Well, my dears," proceeded Mrs. Whine, "I had nothing particular to do, you know, and I thought it would be a satisfaction to you to hear the worst. So I just waited in the Library, to give them a little the start of me, and then I tracked them from shop to shop, with some trifling excuse or other: indeed, I laid out eightpence altogether; but I do not grudge that, my dears, for I knew it would be such a satisfaction to you to know the worst."

"How kind it was of you, Whine!" said Miss Peggy.

"Spending her money, too!" observed Miss Sally.

"And 'the time' it must have taken her!" added Miss Wiggins; who (ever idly-busy) had a favourite adage, of "time" being "money;" for, as she was wont to repeat, "Saving's good earning."

"What more did you see?" inquired the three sisters in a breath.

"Why, I did not exactly 'see' any thing else; but I heard the same account from all the shopkeepers. All had been strictly charged to put forth their best exertions in the cause, and all were loud in their admiration of the fashionable-looking lady, and boisterous with delight at their good fortune in securing her custom. Nay, some went so far as to see kindness to them, individually, in the accompanying attendance of the Doctor; but, I must say, (and I hope, my dear Letty, your acknowledged good sense will prevent your feeling the least chagrined by it,) the man seemed really so infatuated by the charms of the lady, or engrossed by his own designs upon

her, that I could not perceive any symptom of his mind containing a secondary idea. I tell you, he bowed so slightly (if at all, I'm by no means sure) to me, that I was a little hurt; I fancy, I was not worthy to be introduced to this paragon; so he tried to cut me."

"And, pray, what *is* she like, after all, Mrs. Whine?"

"Indeed, the woman's not amiss, to look at, I must say that. I should say, she had been a handsome woman; or, perhaps, more shewy than strictly beautiful. She has still considerable remains, I assure you—and, then, her dress is superb. Dress sets a person off so, you know," fixing her eyes on the dowdy accoutrements of her auditors. "Her eyes and teeth are decidedly good;" (the unmeaning greys and discoloured pegs opposite to her, quailed.) "Complexion, certainly fine—but as for that, and hair, and so forth—we know where they may be found, with plenty of money at command. I'll not venture to say these additions were purchased—I was not near enough to speak decisively on the subject."

"We shall see her at church, I suppose—

the High-hill pew is next to our's, that's one good thing."

"Don't you mean to call on her, then, my dears?"

"I really—"

"It is a matter requiring some degree of consideration—"

"What do you advise, Whine?" said the three Wigginses, respectively.

"I think I would call, were I in your place. It's a very different thing with me, you know. I shall wait to hear your report of her; for, after all, we know nothing of her. I'm not fond of making acquaintances, that may possibly turn out troublesome, to say the least—but business, with you, my dears, renders it quite another affair."

"What use can we, by any chance, make of her, in the way of business?" inquired the single-purposed Miss Sally. "Has she not fixed on a house that does not belong to us? and is she likely to become other than our rival?"

"In more senses than one," added Miss Peggy, with an expressive glance at her sister.

"I'm much inclined to be of your opinion, Mrs. Whine," interposed the superior Wiggins, treating with her customary silent contempt the crude ideas of the helpless Misses Sally and Peggy. "I see clearly, my good Whine, your view of the matter, which, in fact, is not dissimilar from that which I had already partly taken. Although not at present our tenant, who knows the changes that might take place, to bring about an event so desirable? She may quarrel with her present landlord, or a thousand things may turn up. Our white house would be the very thing for such an establishment. Besides, to avoid, would seem to be afraid of her—and if on visiting terms, there would many opportunities offer of gaining a tenant, perhaps, from her very inmates, who might either pair off, or become tired of the gaiety of a boarding house. Yes; I see this will be undoubtedly our wisest course. If she appears at church, (one can't call until she has shewn herself at church—that will be most likely next Sunday,) you and I, Peggy, will walk over to High-hill on Monday."

Thus the conference ended. Sunday was

ardently, even tremulously, wished for; and the determination to put the best face on the thing, involved an expenditure in the purchase of new ribbons to an old bonnet, under which "flying colours," the elder Wiggins had but little attention to bestow on the duties of the morning service, during a painful and half-repentant calculation of "three yards and a half at one-and-twenty pence;" which, after all, as she sighingly reflected, might answer no good purpose. To any of the usual consolations of female vanity, Miss Wiggins' perceptions, if they ever were alive, had become, by age, obtuse; the consciousness of extravagance in dress, had no attendant equivalent whispering "that the ribbon, if dear, was very becoming." The end and aim of the said ribbon—the indefinite and uncertain prospect of its effect upon her adversary, caused the impatient maiden's heart to tremble, and her "ends" to flutter, at the rustling of Dame Dolittle's stuff gown, while she ushered party after party into their respective pews, still approaching not that appropriated to the High-hillers.

To account for this circumstance, it will be

sufficient, to the sagacious reader, to hint that Mrs. Stonecroft had her reasons for not appearing at church during the four first Sundays of her residence at High-hill. Her notions of effect were not ill-founded ; and she possessed considerable skill in acting up to them. Few women, perhaps, could more powerfully strike the blow : she also had the happy art of judiciously timeing it ; and it so chanced, the “iron was” not “hot,” until after the fifth appearance of the new ribbons.

It becomes necessary, now, to admit the reader into some part of the previous history of Mrs. Stonecroft, with her motives for removal from London. The first had been a “mingled yarn” of good and ill. In early and humble life, she had attracted, tho’ not fixed, the admiration of a baronet of sporting celebrity ; who, in his occasional visits to the honest horse-breaker, her father, had been first impelled by astonishment, at her hardihood and dexterity in riding, unsaddled, the wildest of her father’s stud ; to pursue his observations to the conclusion, that she was a monstrous fine girl, and one after his own heart. The consequences were, an elopement, and a temporary

arrangement, which soon left the young hoyden at the disposal of her own actions, and within the reach of the "highest bidder." The various changes of companions that took place in the few subsequent years previous to our introduction to her, it is unnecessary to be very accurate in describing. Her heart, if such a commodity had formed an original part of her composition, remained uninterested by this desultory sort of life, and she resolved to seize the first opportunity of returning to that society from which her late habits had excluded her. An accidental intimacy with a retired hotel-keeper, who died in her house after a six months' sojourn there, having, in the interim bequeathed to her, together with a tolerable share of ready cash, his best manuscript receipts for all kinds of made dishes, and "stylish toss-ups," as he elegantly phrased them; made still more valuable by the daily practice she attained in cooking the same under his able instructions, determined our adventurer to assume the name of the dear departed, he having left no relations to remonstrate against such appropriation. She accordingly attired herself in widow's mourning, took a house in

Sackville-street, and opened it for boarders, under the fictitious appellation of Mrs. Stonecroft.

Many were the bon vivants who remembered their excellent little dinners at Stonecroft's; the piquant seasoning of this and that dish, they had never since found equalled. " 'Twas possible the old boy had left his credentials with his relict;" and one or two applications were consequently the result of her advertisement appearing in the papers.

We all remember the story of the headless saint performing a pilgrimage, of which it was remarked, "the first step must be the greatest difficulty:" so it was in this case. Two elderly gentlemen, whose comfort rested solely on their dinners, took up their abode in Sackville-street, where they seldom or never found their "hopes deferred" or disappointed. And, as men of all ages will naturally talk of the subject individually most interesting to them, it was not wonderful that the boasted advantages of their domicile soon attracted four others to increase the party.

For some time the "concern" answered extremely well. Female society was, how-

ever, the height of Mrs. Stonecroft's ambition ; but some little inaccuracies of manner had attended the first year or two of her speculation in Sackville-street ; and she rather hastily resolved, that a removal to the country, and an entire change of scene, should open a new field for fresh exertions, of more careful construction.

Fame (the jade plays strange tricks at times, and it so chanced that Fame) had trumpeted within her hearing, the wonderful and flourishing success of Dr. Slopall, of Brampton. Her capacious, if not well-stocked mind, at once comprehended the use to be made of so well-connected a neighbour as he would prove, should she decide on taking the offered residence of High-hill House. This, and no other, was the motive of the cunning visitor's attack on the apothecary, and may also be supposed to have had no small influence in the request she afterwards made, for a special recommendation to his tradesmen.

Both parties chuckled inwardly at the benefit each expected to derive from the other. Both were what is vulgarly called "deep." The sequel will prove which of the

two possessed the greater degree of talent, by shewing which contrived to “bite the hardest.”

Had the self-sufficient apothecary instituted, in the neighbourhood of Sackville-street, inquiries that prudence might have justified; his eyes would at once have opened to the deception practised upon him, and the pretended reasons given him for the absence of the expected and boasted-of honourables, have prevented the next and dangerous step of ushering the lady into every shop where he had credit. He would have learned that the “only” “single,” nay “only and single” gentleman inhabiting the boarding-house for the three last months, was a retired hosier, in bad health. For any additional increase to her family, the widow anxiously depended on the advertisement she daily put forth in the *Times* and *Morning Post*.

Thus informed, the reader will be prepared to enter into, perhaps enjoy, the ludicrous scene of scrambling for the Stonecroft favours, that took place at Brampton on the morning after her arrival. Those who could write, and those who could not, (few sported the

extravagance of a printed card,) had each some petition to present, either literary or verbal. The airs of "the Lady," who in many cases gave audience, and condescendingly lamented having made previous engagements to old and worthy tradesmen in London, or in compliance with the strong recommendations of her friend Dr. Slopall, were admirably played off, on the greedy courtiers; many of whom, quite unable to conceal their vexation, relieved themselves by spiteful invectives levelled against their more fortunate rivals.

"Mr. Spice, the grocer, mem;" simpered the shewy footman, hired on the day of leaving town.

"Reach my house-book from the sofa, James; let me see—Butcher, Baker, oh, here it is, Grocer, Cinnamon; engaged, you see, James—say, I am engaged to Cinnamon."

"He requested me to insinuate to you, mem," replied James, who was one of the most highly polished of lackeys, and would have held himself disgraced by using any word of less than three syllables, on any occasion but that of dire necessity, "what he

was desirous of effectuating. I intimated to him, mem, your decision, respecting the arrangements already commenced with Mr. Cinnamon; but he requested me to intercede with you for the permission of an interview, on the assurance of the explanation proving satisfactory to both parties."

"Well, shew him in, James—what can the man want?"

Mr. Spice entered: a short, dumpy figure, as thick, and nearly as dark, as one of his own nutmegs.

"What is it you have to say to me, my good man? I have engaged my grocer, as my servant has already told you."

"I ask pardon, ma'am, for making so bold, but I think, at least I hope, and so does my wife, there has been some little mistake here, ma'am. My card was here, ma'am, before Cinnamon's, I am perfect certain of that, and, indeed, so is my wife."

"I really am not aware," replied his expected patroness, "of having seen either of them, I acted on the advice of my good friend Dr. Slopall—my only anxiety was to secure the very best accommodations to be had—

for money is no object with me, my table must be well supplied."

"I'm sure it's a strange thing how Dr. Slopall should think of naming Cinnamon to you, ma'am, instead of me; I sarves the Doctor as well as he does, we takes it week about. It's usual, you know, ma'am, in Doctor's families, and schools, and that—"

"But I do not want two grocers; my object is, by dealing largely with one, to make it worth his while to serve me satisfactorily—my bills will be heavy, as I have the best of every thing; and, as I said before, money is quite a secondary consideration with me."

"That's exactly what I understood to be the case, ma'am; for my wife had it from Mrs. Tape, and that's the very reason I made free to step up to you myself; for, as I said to Mrs. Spice, you little knew what hands you were in with Cinnamon; an idle fellow, that never remembers half his orders when he's sober, and it's seldom he's to be caught so, and that Dr. Slopall can't deny, and speak truth."

"At all events, I must make trial of him, Mr. Spice; and if I find him as you describe, I must change—that's all."

"No doubt, ma'am, I'm willing to abide the consequences, but if you can drink the stuff he sells for tea, ma'am, and so my wife says, I'm done; but it is'n't likely, ma'am, he has'n't the connexions, nor don't know how to go to market as I do. However, ma'am, I'll be proud to serve you to your complete satisfaction, in a tradesman-like manner, whenever you please to honour me with an order."

After the delivery of which speech, Spice departed.

"Three laundress's, mem, are awaiting your leisure in the housekeeper's apartment."

"Shew them up, one at a time, James."

"In the drawing-room, mem? I beg pardon; but their appearance scarcely entitles their ascending the great hall-staircase; and the effusion of the liquids they have indulged in, mem, I fear will be prejudicial to you, mem."

"Say then, I shall speak to Dr. Slopall, and decide according to his opinion."

"Here's a letter, mem, one of them brought, on the probability of your not granting her an audience."

The epistle commenced as follows.

Onered Muddum,

ering as ow you was a going to com setel in this plase, I tuk the liberty to hax the fever to be tried first, i hang on the green and non of the huthers is hallowed, and uses blaching lickwid very hingerous to linnen partcklar whats holdish, and drinks hall of them therebi singing the Cloes, kippin till sondy and most times pauns em before alls dun. And my tems is lo with a family of 7.

Your umbel serv.

SOPY DUDS.

and ires the best of ands to hiron and git hup.

"So much for Sophia Duds—well, James, who else is cap in hand to me?"

"A person from Kingsmead, mem, a kind of general merchant, I find; he announces himself, in his enumeration of articles. Here's every thing, mem, you'll perceive, set down, that you can possibly want in supply of the house; he vouches for their being universally

of the very first quality, and warrants their producing considerable satisfaction. By his account, mem, the tradespeople of Brampton are a horrid reprobate set, quite unfit to serve such a house as this, he assures me—not sober three times a week—indeed, he hinted that it would require peculiar caution in admitting them, to keep all extraneous spoons and conveniences of that sort out of their reach, or he could not be answerable for consequences."

"This is a desperate account, indeed, James ; however, I am quite sick of them all, and will see no more to-day—tell them so, and I shall consult with Dr. Slopall as to my final selections.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE MORNING VISIT.

THE united exertions of "Post" and "Times" having succeeded in attracting, by the reiterated promises of "delightfully select country residence," embracing every advantage that could, or could not, be wanted, three additional companions to the original sick hosier, Mrs. Stonecroft considered it politic to parade her party to church one fine Sunday morning, being the sixth of her abode at High-hill.

Mr. Sockins, the hosier, had vainly endeavoured to excuse his attendance, on the plea of incapability for the exertion; but, by the urgent representation of his hostess, that his presence would confer a personal obligation on herself, he was prevailed on to attire his

shrunken figure for the occasion. A consumptive cheek, and a look of general internal suffering, were all the claims of poor Sockins to any thing in the shape of "interest," and he was quickly dismissed from the inquiring eyes of the long-looking congregation, to make way for his immediate successor, as the party passed up the narrow aisle, which admitted but of one at a time being paraded before them.

The second boarder was "a dandy of sixty," one who had evidently seen the world, and betrayed infallible proofs of having entered rather profusely into its indulgences. The table was his chief inducement, in placing his well-fed "corpus" under the surveillance of Mrs. Stonecroft. His inclinations demanded, and his income justified that a well-appointed and unexceptionably dressed dinner should form a principal object of his daily solicitude. A single man need not be many years in discovering that these luxuries are obtained at a much smaller expenditure, by the rules of multiplied mouths and divided purses, than as a solitary housekeeper. The clubs, for ten or a dozen years, supply the deside-

ratum ; but when crow's feet commence their operations, and baldness begins to be undeniable, an accompanying craving is felt for domestic society ; the gradually growing inclination for evening repose, renders the "club" no longer eligible, and a boarding-house is the next resource. To this decision had circumstances brought Mr. Spritely, whose gentlemanly appearance told in forcible contrast to the humble demeanour of the ci-devant hosier.

Next in the procession, came—open your eyes, all ye distressed females of Brampton—a young man !—positively a young, and by no means an ill-looking man ! Tall, and with a military appearance ; at least, by such term was translated his assumption of a pair of black and bushy mustachios. The fourth candidate for public inspection puzzled the whole assembly ; his insignificant figure, and mean style of physiognomy, was passed over with something like disappointment ; and it was not until it became generally understood that this personage rejoiced in the title of Captain Ward, that he began to be thought something of. The title of Captain (the only

one, alas, our lady had succeeded in producing,) was trifling in the eyes of Slopall, who could not entirely subdue his disappointment at the “unfortunate circumstance” of a sprained ankle still detaining Sir John Knightwell at Windsor, and the dangerous illness of the Hon. Miss Winterton’s uncle, keeping her from joining the party at High-hill House. These were the apothecary’s private reflections, as he paid his, now customary, daily visit, on the day following the appearance of the long-expected group at church.

“How very unfortunate” Sir John’s accident, just now—at a distance, too—had it been deferred to his return “home,” here would have been a baronet, at all events, at once thrown into his hands!

The absence of these three distinguished individuals was as loudly, if not so sincerely, lamented by the lady of the mansion: the fright Sir John’s accident must have produced to his amiable lady, would inevitably bring on one of her severe nervous attacks, and might possibly retard still longer their return. It really “was” provoking, to think she thus missed the pleasure of placing both patients

under the care of her worthy friend, "then and there present."

"I would compound for the absence of a couple of tiresome invalids," interrupted Mr. Hunter, the hero of the moustaches; "if you would produce us a lady or two, Mrs. Stonecroft—positively, the house would then be a perfect paradise; but, without the ladies!—by the bye, about what age is this Miss Winterton, who is expected?"

"Too old for you, Mr. Hunter, or I'm greatly mistaken."

"Well, but—it depends—if the pill were handsomely gilded, I might be induced to try it. What has she, I wonder?"

"At present, only eight hundred a year, I believe, but immense expectations from the uncle; who, by what she writes me word, must be at death's door; and, consequently, she, of course, is unwilling to leave him."

"Oh, decidedly!—most—undoubtedly!—'twould be perfect madness. The old boy has my best wishes, however, for a speedy journey to the next world; as, I confess, I am a little anxious to see the heiress. The fact is, my friends urge me to marry, (he should have said

his creditors,) I have declined two or three tolerable proposals ; for you know, Mrs. Stonecroft, it is not easy to meet with money, beauty, and rank united. Now, the first I am indifferent about. I'm a careless dog about money ; having had plenty of it always, I suppose must be the reason of my indifference in this particular. I could make myself contented with youth and beauty, but my family are all so confoundedly ‘high.’” (One of his worthy relatives was hung for forgery ; and his father “had a place” in the pillory, for some mistake or other, that could never be satisfactorily explained.)

“ Are you one of the Gloucestershire Hunters ?” inquired Mr. Spritely.

“ Not exactly—that is, we *have* relations in almost every county in England, but they are mostly in the female line.”

“ Aye, man-hunters—I thought it not unlikely,” drily observed the ancient dandy ; who, however, with his knowledge of the world, and the insight it gave him into the character of his new companion, had gained that proportion of prudent sagacity, which enabled him to confine his suspicions

to his own breast. The result of this inward reflection was followed up by an equally select determination; and he, with difficulty, retained it within the same sanctuary, as he carefully buttoned up his pockets, thinking, "I would not lend that fellow five pounds, if he were to ask me."

At this crisis, the door was thrown open by James, who announced the approach of "Miss Wiggins and Miss Peggy Wiggins."

The chair on which Dr. Slopall reclined, was one of those invaluable inventions of modern luxury, known by the name of a Half-easy; and he only could have described its claim to the title, at the moment of this fearful, as it was unexpected, double apparition. He half rose, and quite reseated himself, during the formal interchange of bows and curtseys consequent on this invasion. A stiff, a very stiff bend of the upper neck, was the result of the first dart from the elder Wiggins's eye, as it shot through the consciously guilty heart of the trembling culprit. Miss Peggy waited but for this assisting clue to guide her movements, and, immediately on receiving the credentials, she also bowed her

scraggy throat—but, owing to the agitation by which she was overpowered, it chanced that her eyes, in disobedience to their owner, at that moment fell on Mr. Hunter. By this faux pas, as Miss Wiggins afterwards reproachfully remarked to her sister, she committed the double fault of giving that puppy Hunter undue encouragement, and leaving Slopall to imagine she was disturbed by his desertion of them.

Poor Peggy! she seldom did right, and she knew it. The professed conviction of her sins, however, served only to bring down, with tenfold weight, the ire of her self-possessed sister; and had she not been abundantly supplied with nerves—(those useful members ever called upon to sustain the blame of all her misdemeanors)—there is no knowing what excuse could have been made for the errors of commission and omission of Miss Peggy Wiggins.

The determined Letty, having committed her widest smile to Mrs. Stonecroft's discretion, commenced her survey and comments upon the various articles of taste and fashion by which she found herself surrounded. It is not, perhaps, the precise mode under which

the formality of a first visit is usually encountered ; and can be excused only by the engrossing employments and taste of Miss Wiggins. In truth, she had come with a full intention, not alone to see every thing, but to point out every possible defect or deficiency ; and her opening speech was in harmony with this design.

"A very pleasant situation this you have selected, Mrs. Stonecroft ; at least so I have always considered it ; in opposition, I must own, to the general opinion. Positively, I consider it, after the Mall, the best in the neighbourhood—you find it damp, though, I fear ?"

Now, Miss Wiggins did not even hope for an answer in the affirmative ; since she knew it to be the only undeniably dry house within two miles of her. So, to prevent the possible denial of this charge, she proceeded with great rapidity, to add : "Not that I should object to it on that account ; I do not hold a very dry soil to be, by any means, conducive to health. It's lonely, to be sure, but probably you are not timid ; and, indeed, as the furni-

ture is your landlord's, your anxiety on that head must be inconsiderable."

"I trust principally to the men-servants, for our safety," replied Mrs. Stonecroft, "and hope their vigilance may prove sufficient, without obliging me to call on the gallantry of the gentlemen present."

"Yes, yes, I believe you are tolerably safe," observed Mr. Hunter; "we form rather too strong a guard, altogether, to come within the attacks of any but the most determined gang."

"I never heard that murder was committed in the house, to be sure; indeed, it has been robbed but three times within my recollection; and in those cases, no doubt appeared of the robbery having originated with the servants: probably your men have been long in your family, and in that case you can depend on them."

Miss Wiggins had learned that both men were hired the day previous to leaving London, and had prepared this "fling" accordingly.

"Oh, I should be terrified out of my life," observed Miss Peggy, who thought she might

safely chime in upon ground so distinctly marked out by her commanding officer : “ I’m sure I have not had a regular night’s rest since they broke into our house last winter.”

“ The thieves, or your domestics ? ” inquired, rather maliciously, Captain Ward.

Certain private signals here intimated to the blundering Peggy, that she had adopted a mistaken course ; in attempting to turn from which, she floundered still deeper, by adding,

“ They behaved very well, too, considering, for they only took a cold goose, that was in the larder, and our three teaspoons, and a gown of my sister Letty’s, and some candles, and a broach of Sally’s, and—”

“ My dear Peggy,” interposed the disgraced General, shocked at the poverty displayed in this enumeration ; “ how can you indulge in such raillery, on so slight an acquaintance with the present company ? the fact is,” turning to the lady of the house, “ my sister alludes to a joke played on us by some of our nephews, in the innocence of youth and high spirits.”

“ A joke—was it, Letty ? well, I never heard that before.”

"Beautiful cabinet, there ;" pursued Miss Wiggins. "I was going to compliment you on the taste exhibited in the furnishing of this room, forgetting at the moment you had it only on hire. Really, it proves vast confidence in a tenant, to leave such valuable articles, to the risk of good or bad usage. It's all very well, where you furnish for letting ; you select things accordingly. I cannot say I should like to admit a family into my own house ; but, to be sure, we have such a variety of ornamental knick-knacks."

"And don't you remember how vexed we were, one year, that the Adams's had our house—no, I think it was the Thompson's—and when we returned to it, they had broken two of the China vases, that Sally and I had mended so nicely with cement, before they came in?"

The patience of Miss Wiggins was exhausted ; she rose to retire : the force of habit, however, did not permit of her doing so without a parting cut, in which she proposed to comprise the full bitterness of her excited feelings.

"Unacquainted, as you probably are, " com-

menced the maiden, “ with various little inconveniences attached to this place, I can only say, I shall be most happy to render you any advice or assistance within my power. Fruit (although I see considerable promise on the trees) you will scarcely have a chance of keeping till ripe, the garden lies so near the high road. No doubt you have discovered the scarcity of water ; we have an excellent pump, and can always supply that deficiency ; and should you find (as I have reason to believe you will) that the rain penetrates the upper rooms, the roof being much out of repair, I shall have great pleasure in making up a spare bed or two, at a moment’s notice, for the accommodation of any of your inmates.”

“ And if you should leave this house,” added Miss Peggy, “ sister can let you have one on the Mall, such a bargain !”

“ God help me!—to be sure, never mortal was saddled with such a nincompoop, as you are,” grumbled the baffled Miss Wiggins, on getting a short distance from the house. “ There is no possibility of making you understand, even when to be silent—did I not, before we set out, explain most clearly to you, all that I

intended to say, in the course of the visit—yet must you keep blundering on with your malapropos observations,—enough to provoke a saint, that's what you are, Peggy Wiggins!"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry—I meant it all for the best; but I'm always wrong, it seems—I wish Sally were well enough to go visiting with you—I never know what to say—and you promised to smile when I was getting astray, you know."

"If you felt conscious of depending on that for your guidance, you had better have looked at me occasionally, instead of fixing your eyes, as you did, on Captain Ward.—They all noticed how you stared at him, I can tell you that."

"I didn't know, I declare, that I regarded him in particular—I think I looked quite as much at Mr Hunter, and at the other elderly gentleman—indeed, I never am in company with a man, but it reminds me of the blighted hopes of my early life—you know to what I allude, Letty—"

"So may all the parish, if they like to waste their time in listening to you—for you have

not even that share of common sense, that ought to keep you silent on the subject : one way, or another, I'm to be pitied !—I feel that."

On the exit of the ladies, one long and not very gentle laugh, pervaded the saloon of High-hill House.

"Well !" exclaimed the quiescent hosier, " If these is manners !—"

"Manners !" repeated Mr. Hunter : "No ; It's a pair of vinegar cruets, I verily imagine—why, Mrs. Stonecroft, what are we possibly to do, if these walking acidities are a specimen of the society we are to find here ?"

"The taller cruet did appear to be filled with acid," said Mr. Spritely ; "but I thought the other honoured you with some glances, intended, at least, to possess more of sugar than vinegar—"

"Not on me—not on me, alone—for mercy sake, let the bounty fall !—You, I am sure, received an equal share of her admiration—and Captain Ward was by no means left out of the general inspection. I should venture to hope, her favours were far from assuming an individual direction."

"And I thought," observed Sockins, "the

lady once or twice fixed her eyes upon me in a very peculiar manner—I felt quiet glad you were all present."

Here the laugh was renewed; and, on its subsiding, Mrs. Stonecroft appealed to the still present apothecary, whose cowed demeanor, during the visitation of the spinsters, had not escaped her observation.

"By the bye, Dr. Slopall, you know something of these ladies, of course—nay, I think, if I mistake not, the day I first came down here, you mentioned their being particular friends of yours?"

"They are—at least, they were—that is to say, they always have been—" stammered the Doctor: "I—they—"

"But they did not speak to you, I think—nay, I particularly observed, that not one of the sweet glances, showered so plentifully on us, travelled by chance towards you. Is the damsel fickle, or are you her perjured swain — one of the two, I guess — hey, Doctor?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Hunter—far from it—in fact, if I ever—not that any thing could be said, to be actually—but should it be de-

creed to me to choose between the two—I almost incline to say the elder—though, at the same time, I assure this good company—”

“ There’s not the least occasion, my good friend—it must be sufficiently evident to every person of any judgment, that a man of your pretensions could never for a moment contemplate such a sacrifice.”

“ That’s exactly what occurred to me, my good Madam—and I was exceedingly cautious in my proceedings—but, in a little village like this, you know, it’s impossible to escape the unfounded judgment passed on one’s slightest actions—otherwise, my taking a quiet rubber at the Wigginses, of an evening, could not have been construed into serious designs upon any of those ladies.”

“ Surely not—clearly not, Doctor—mere gossip—but were there no covert acts of the opposite party—little friendly suppers, for instance—eh, Doctor—can you conscientiously tell us, your cautious heart encountered no sally of this kind from the fair besiegers ?”

“ Not ‘Sally’—at all events, I must exonerate that damsel from an individual attack,

poor thing ! But, to own the truth, I fancy the sisters did form some idea of appropriating me to them generally—”

“ Come ! that’s pretty well confessed ; and, certainly explains various indications of anger expressed in the voluminous looks of the elder lady—her indescribable smile, of dire import, whose thin surface of sugar, leaves to the inspection of all spectators, the stream that runs

‘in bitterness and vinegar below,’

and the wavering and uncertain cast of reception adopted by our friend the Doctor, here, on their entrance—”

“ But, seriously, Dr. Slopall, I hope there may be no more such inflictions to be expected, as that which we have endured this morning ?”

“ Not any chance of it, my dear Madam ; there is no need whatever of alarming yourself by such an apprehension. The Wigginses are a distinct genus here. You will, possibly, be required to endure a visit from them now and then, unless you can, by some means, render it quite evident to their perceptions,

that you do not intend, either at this or any future time, that they shall reap the smallest benefit from your acquaintance."

"Be that my course, then," replied Mrs. Stonecroft; "and, by way of a tolerably comprehensible hint to that effect, I shall take care to leave their visit unreturned."

This was decidedly the decision Slopall desired should be made; and he departed, considerably relieved in his mind in consequence thereof.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE DEBUTANTE.

"Now, Mr. Hunter! what will you give me for my news, this morning?" inquired Mrs. Stonecroft, as she entered the breakfast room, with an open letter in her hand.

"Miss Winterton coming? oh, glorious!"

"Not Miss Winterton, but a lady—a Miss," too—here is her letter, in which she requests to have an immediate answer, stating all particulars of terms, &c. as it is out of her power to come in search of the necessary information."

"Pray let her have one, this moment—and do not forget to mention there being four candidates for her favour already assembled—it may have weight—but what is her name, and how does she express herself? Do you imagine her to be a person of fortune?"

It did not happen to agree with Mrs. Stonecroft's plans, to shew her credentials; which, in point of fact, professed not to proceed from the expected boarder herself, but from the pen of some kind friend, anxious to secure the advantages held forth "as per advertisement in the Times of this morning," provided the terms were "very moderate."

It did not suit our lady of High-hill, to publish a circumstance so derogatory to the importance she intended to bestow on the new inmate, should the sequel prove her such. The private inclination and intention was to secure the "lady" at her own price; the realization of the long-cherished hopes would be cheaply purchased, by a female addition to the household, even on the lowest terms; and, with this conviction fully impressed on her mind, she resolved to be "generous"—for, to so amiable a motive as generosity, did poor humanity attribute the selfish determination.

"It will be a step, at any rate," reflected she; "and Hunter pesters my life out, for ladies. Who knows, but the gaining of one may soon introduce others? she shall come

for anything or nothing—that's decided.” The wording of her reply still required some delicacy. Towards an utter—an unseen stranger, she could not profess the interest she “unavoidably” felt from any describable appearance, exerting power sufficient to account for the diminution of the customary terms. So she could only plead, that the indefinite absence of “two of her ladies” rendered it particularly desirable to receive an agreeable female companion—adding, that could the “friend” satisfy her on this point, terms should not separate them—she was willing to receive the lady as soon as she pleased, and upon those agreeable to herself.

“But her name—you have not told us her name—Mrs. Stonecroft?”

“Nor her means, as Mr. Hunter observes; and if her family are of this county—also, if she hunts?”

“Do you happen to mean anything, Mr. Spritely?”

“Not I, my good fellow—I never meant anything, in my life—I merely speak by way of keeping up conversation—”

“Pray don’t quarrel for the lady, before she

arrives," exclaimed their hostess. "I will take all the necessary precautions, you may be sure, before I admit her into my house. It will require undeniable references, to justify me in introducing any one to the acquaintance of the Hon. Miss Winterton, and my other unexceptionable friends. Money alone, will not satisfy me—my own very handsome income renders that quite a secondary consideration: provided her connexions are high, and her manners good, I shall care for very little more. I must, however, examine closely into these points, before we come to any agreement.

" Still, we have not heard her name, all this time—do give us her name."

" Corner—Miss Corner—an uncommon name, rather."

" Corner! never heard the name before," said Mr. Hunter.

" One of the 'four Corners,' probably," observed Mr. Spritely.

" It has a meanish sound with it, I think," remarked Sockins: " I've heard say, that all names of distinction have three syllables."

" For instance, Bacon, Byron, Argyle,

Norfolk, Bedford, &c. &c. &c." observed Mr. Sprightly.

"Ah, but those are exceptions," returned the hosier; "I mean now, amongst the nobility."

"I always understood the Dukes of Argyle, Norfolk, and Bedford to hold a respectable rank amongst that honourable body, Mr. Sockins: but, perhaps, I am under an error," said Captain Ward.

"Oh no, I dare say you are perfectly correct, Captain," replied the gentle hosier, who seldom ventured to dissent from the opinions of any of the party, and failed not to retract a hastily-asserted opinion, on the slightest hint to that effect, "only, I think, myself, a long name is a great addition—"

"To a short one—oh, decidedly."

"You, gentlemen, are so quick there's no coming up to you. Since I lost my health, I've been a little dull of comprehension—before that, I was reckoned quite witty, particularly as a lad. My mother, I believe, was a tolerable 'cute woman; she died when I was young; and my father used to think her abilities had descended

on me; for whenever I said any thing funny, he would cry, ‘ Ah, mother-wit ! ’ ”

“ It is wonderful, when we consider how talent runs in families,” said Spritely, “ just like red hair, or madness. My chief objection to wit, though, is, it makes a man many enemies.”

“ Dear me ! no, sir : not at all, I assure you —I declare, I never had an enemy in my life, to my knowledge,” responded the innocent stocking merchant.

“ Did you ever write any thing, Mr. Sockins.”

“ To be sure I did—when I was in business I wrote out every bill of parcels with my own hand.”

“ Books, I allude to—did you ever write a book ? ”

“ Just day-books, and ledgers, and so on—nothing more.”

“ Then you never printed and published—never gave the world a work of your own composition ? ”

“ Lord bless you, Captain Ward, no—what should I write about ? I shouldn’t know what to say. My sister, though, has a turn that

way—she keeps an album, and sometimes writes in it pieces of her own."

"That must be something worth seeing—you don't happen to have it here, Mr. Sockins?"

"I have not—she never lets it out of her own hands, for fear of its being copied—the originality of the pieces, she tells me, makes them of such value. Mrs. Stonecroft has been kind enough to invite her down here for a day or two—and you may depend on her bringing it under her arm. I often tell her she looks as if she were carrying out a half dozen of silk or cotton hose—he!"

"In the mean time, could you not recollect some little trifle which embellishes your sister's collection, just by way of giving us an idea of her album?"

"There is an epitaph," replied the simple-hearted Sockins, "written by an old lady, who gave it herself to my sister—she is quite a respectable old lady, I assure you—lived in the city, within three doors of us—and has put a clause in her will, that requires its being placed upon her tombstone—for my part, I don't think much on it, though Sister

Lucy says 'tis greatly admired. I think I can remember it all—it aint long—

Afflictions sore long time I bore—  
Physicians were in vain ;  
Till God did please to send me ease—

something or other about ‘pain,’ the last line is, I forget exactly how it runs.”

“ Very good—very good, indeed, Mr. Sockins, and very well remembered, for one who does not profess to remember poetry—quite satisfactory, too, in its assurance that we have a great treat in store, in the perusal of your sister’s album.”

“ Suppose, gentlemen, we adjourn to the green, and take a peep at the rustic cricketers—they appear strongly attached to the game here, if not particularly skilful—one of the operators (I suppose that is their title) received a frightful blow, from a ball, on Monday.”

“ And is since dead, in consequence, I can tell you, Mr. Hunter : my maid related the occurrence to me this morning, and I could scarcely command the due portion of composure, expected, I fancy, from me, on the occasion.”

“ What could there be so amusing, in the

poor man's sudden death?" inquired Mr. Spritely.

"Nothing, as to the death; but it was the manner of relating it. Something led me to remark what a very wet morning it was—"

"‘A pouring rain, Ma’am,’" said Mason; "‘and poor John Bowles is to be buried to-day, too.’"

"How will the rain affect him?" I inquired; "and who is John Bowles?"

"The poor man, Ma’am, what got such a hurt, the other day, from a cricket-ball; he went home very bad, and his wife thought it was plums; and, next day, he was worse, and still she thought it must be the plums: she gave him some brandy, and he grew worse, but she could not lay it to any thing but the plums; so she gave him some gin-and-water hot—and then they fetched a doctor, for he was a great deal worse, and he said it was the wrongest thing they could have done, (that’s giving him the brandy and gin,) and it was too late, (fetching the doctor, I mean,) for it mortified his arm—with a family of nine children, too, poor woman!"

"I give you credit, if you kept a grave

countenance during this melancholy history," said Mr. Hunter; "I suspect Mrs. Mason is addicted to gossiping, and considers herself qualified to be the diffuser of useful knowledge to the household. I sometimes overhear her holding forth at a great rate to the lower menials in the laundry, the partition between which, and my room, gives me the benefit of many enlightening discourses."

"Mason has lived in very high families," said Mrs. Stonecroft, "I took her from the service of the honourable Miss Harrington, Lord Siltoun's daughter."

"So I should have guessed," replied Mr. Hunter, "from a conversation I was an involuntary ear-witness of yesterday morning. Mrs. Mason was describing the situation and nature of the house she had lived in, while in Lord Siltoun's family; and I must confess I did not shut my ears, for I thought her descriptive powers too good to be thrown away on her other auditor, poor Betty Scrubbett, who seemed lost in admiration at the superior acquirements of her fellow-servant."

"Yes, this is a nice house, certainly,

began Mrs. Mason ; but bless me, child, if you had but a seen my lord's country-house ; all beautiful cast stone, with pillows all round it, and a porticul at the front entrance, and two wings.' ”

“ ‘Wings ?’ ” interposed Betty, “ ‘what, for goodness sake, Mrs. Mason, should a house do with wings ?’ ”

“ ‘La, child, I don’t mean wings to fly with ; it’s where the offices is.’ ”

“ ‘Oh,’ ” responded Betty, evidently as wise as before.”

“ ‘And then the drawing-room,’ ” continued the narrator. “ ‘The drawing-room, bless your soul, would have held this house and grounds, a’ most ; and in the one end of it there stood a Gammoning-table—you knows what I means by a Gammoning-table ?’ ”

“ ‘No,’ ” replied the novice.”

“ ‘Why, a table what they plays Backgammon and Chest upon, havint you never seen ’em play Chest ?’ ”

“ ‘Not as I knows on—what like is it ?’ ”

“ ‘Why, there’s a long table, and bags at the corners ; and they plays it with sticks, pushing balls about.’ ”

"‘Oh, you mean Bag an’ Tell, I’ve seen Miss Wigginses do that; perhaps Chest’s a new fashioned name for it. But I say, Mrs. Mason, I often wonder how comes Miss Harrington’s name not to be the same as her father’s; you calls him Lord Siltoun, always. I can’t make that out.’”

"‘Because you understand, Betty, he’s a lord by heirship. You know every gentleman’s a gentleman born, but he can’t be a lord not without he comes to the title by heirship: same as a lady, you understand; a lady, if she’s a gentleman’s wife, or daughter, or that, she’s a lady, but she aint called lady not without she comes to the title by heirship; same as a lord, now don’t you see?’”

"‘Ah! oh yes—but its funny too, aint it, Mrs. Mason?’”

"‘But now, my good Mrs. Stonecroft,’ pursued Mr. Hunter, “pray write to this fair Q in a corner—this Miss Corner; take advantage of our absence, and compose an epistle in your most attractive language.”

Having previously resolved on the line to be pursued in this affair, the letter itself was soon dispatched, and on the second morning

following that on which the first communication had been received, and when the same breakfast party were speculating on the chances of an answer by the momentarily expected postman, their ears were rejoiced by the sound of the carriage-gate bell. Before they could recover from the surprise caused by so early an arrival, a carriage had drawn up at the hall-door, and a female voice was heard, requesting a few moments' interview with Mrs. Stonecroft, previous to the removal of the luggage.

"It's the Winterton, it must be the charming Miss Winterton :—uncle dead !—will read —every thing settled ;" exclaimed Mr. Hunter.

Now, Mrs. Stonecroft had powerful reasons for knowing it could not be Miss Winterton, inasmuch as she was conscious that, that personage owed existence only to the lively coinage of her own brain, brought forward to aid and assist in her present schemes. The very attractive epistle to Miss Corner, also, rendered her less susceptible of surprise than the gentlemen, when James entered with that lady's request for an audience.

Begging one of the gentlemen to take her place at the breakfast table, where she would endeavour to prevail on Miss Corner to join them ; Mrs. Stonecroft proceeded to the saloon. But unless pens were painting brushes, and ink comprised all the varieties of the most vivid colours, I could give the reader no idea of the overwhelming, the withering astonishment of that awful moment ! Mrs. Stonecroft, in her eagerness to secure a female boarder, had quite neglected to inform herself of the personal appearance of the article in question. No tongue can describe her horror, on viewing the specimen before her. A hasty examination of form and feature, proved, beyond the possibility of doubt, that to the mind alone could she look for any redeeming quality in her visitor. To gain time for recovering her astounded powers of speech, she waved her hand towards a sofa ; on which both ladies seated themselves. She then recommenced, more carefully, an inspection of her newly arrived inmate.

Her long, lank, and bony figure was enveloped in a faded muslin dress of many colours. A shawl of trumpery material, and a very

dirty leghorn bonnet, with still dirtier ribands, soiled kid slippers, and highly pinked silk stockings, completed her tawdry attire. The angular and distressingly prominent bones were covered—alas ! not concealed—by a seemingly endless quantity of coarse, thick skin, of a yellowish brown colour ; the ample folds of which gave evidence of having, at some period, far, far anterior to the present, been better filled. It was a skin that an alderman might have rejoiced in ; and would have been well adapted to *Œolus*. It hung in folds, as if waiting the blessings of a full feed, or a hurricane, for the power of proving its capabilities.

A shrill, harsh voice thus greeted the mistress of the mansion.

“ You are, no doubt, surprised, Madam, to see me arrive thus early in the day.”

Mrs. Stonecroft could not utter the sentence implying, (and, perhaps, from the tenor of her letter, expected,) that the arrival could not be ill-timed ; for, in truth, she felt most forcibly, it would have proved so at any hour of the day or night. She bowed, and, in the last extreme of a forlorn hope of some mistake

having occurred, said, hesitatingly, "Your name, I believe, Madam, is—"

"Corner," replied the figure, with hope-dispelling distinctness.

"You received my letter, then, no doubt, and—"

"I have received, Madam, your most handsome and friendly letter; the liberality of the sentiments expressed towards me, emboldened me at once to close with your too generous proposals. I should have waited on you, previous to taking possession of the apartment you so kindly appropriate to me; and which, from your description, I am sure I shall find all I can desire. But as I make it a point never to leave any clue in the boarding-house I quit, by which I might be traced by idle visitants, I thought it best, since I could entertain no doubts as to my reception, to move my trunks, &c. off at once; which I did this morning, before any of the family were stirring, and accordingly here I am."

In this occurrence had Mrs. Stonecroft overreached her aim. By offering to receive Miss Corner on her own terms, she waved

the necessity there would otherwise have been for an interview to settle preliminaries ; when she might have invented some excuse for “backing out” from the rash offer.

“ You will probably imagine,” continued the yellow spinster, “ that such a course of procedure must have been unsatisfactory to those with whom I have occasionally resided ; this difficulty, however, was easily obviated, by my paying as I always did, in advance ; by which means I also secured the advantage of leaving a house at any moment, and without giving notice thereof. Our arrangements, however”—Miss Corner smiled, if indeed a ghastly grin may be so called—“ have been on so unexceptionable a scale of liberality on your side, that I am unable to offend you, by even naming the article of money, to one whose plentiful income gives her the power to act without reference to so sordid a consideration.”

“ Humph ! ” thought Mrs. Stonecroft ; “ fixed then, it appears ! —on the gratis list—what shall I ever do with the creature, and how can I possibly produce such a scare-crow at my table ? As for Hunter, poor fellow, I dread seeing

him ; I shall have no peace of my life for him. Nay, ten to one if I don't lose them all, unless by good management."

Acting upon this reflection, she resolved to put the best face she could assume on the occasion. And, having pleaded surprise at the early arrival ; made her reception rather a silent one, merely adding, "let me now conduct you to your apartment, where your trunks shall immediately be brought to you, as you would, of course, wish to make some alteration in your dress, before your introduction to the gentlemen below. By the bye, I have prepared them to consider you a person in affluent circumstances ; you will, therefore, be on your guard, to prevent any idea you might give to the contrary, if acting without this caution ; which, however, I beg you to receive in good part, and as intended solely to prevent any humiliation you might possibly encounter, should the terms of our engagement be made known."

"How truly noble and considerate is your conduct to me, my dear Madam ; I really never experienced such disinterested generosity in my life before."

"So I should have guessed," half muttered her perplexed and dissatisfied landlady, as she hastened to usher her unwelcome lodger to her room; thereby gaining the double advantage of placing her out of sight in her present state of dishabille, and of securing a few moments' private cogitation, as to the line of conduct to be adopted under the provoking circumstances. "You will excuse the freedom of my remark," she added, more audibly; "I have seen something of the world, and have always observed the immense value to be gained, or lost, by the nature of first impressions. I would, therefore, if you will kindly excuse me, make it my particular request, that, in regard to dress, you should be more than usually careful here, as my gentlemen are mostly of high family and connections, and, it so happens, are also close observers of the personal appearance of females. Excuse the liberty I take, on so short an acquaintance. Here come the trunks—now I shall send you some breakfast, on a tray; and you will have ample leisure to unpack, and dress for dinner. Six is our hour—Excuse me. I will look in upon you, in the course of the morning."

How to parry, and reply to, the questions that awaited her return to the breakfast-room, was a matter of no small difficulty to Mrs. Stonecroft. There was little time, however, for reflection ; and she trusted chiefly to the luck which had usually brought her out of scrapes, and to the effrontery of a hasty composition, invented during her descent to the parlour, where, of course, her entrance was impatiently waited for.

“Well ! Mrs. Stonecroft—where’s the Lady ?” cried one.

“ And what is she like ?” asked another.

“ Young, or old ? come tell us all about her —you can tell us every thing, you know, if she’s not coming down yet.”

“ Let me have some breakfast, I beg of you, and then I will satisfy you all, gentlemen. Here, James, bring fresh rolls, and desire Martha to come, and take them up to Miss Corner, with some coffee. She begs you will excuse her appearing at table, this morning, gentlemen—finding herself a little fatigued from the drive.”

“ Delicate, it seems—Not sickly, I hope ?”

"By no means, but you are all strangers to her, you know, and—"

"Ah ! young then, I guess."

"Why, not very young ; at least she looks perhaps older than she really is ; which may be accounted for, by the trouble and vexation she has experienced with a law-suit, whereby she was very near losing all her fortune."

"Oh, ho—very near—not quite then ?" said Mr. Hunter ; "very good—very good. What, now, may her fortune be, on a rough guess ?"

"What with lawyers' fees, and the enormous expenses she has been put to, she tells me it is reduced to twenty thousand pounds ! and when one considers the reverse of such a pittance from the expectation of twelve thousand a year, you cannot wonder at the traces of grief and disappointment it has produced on her face."

"Poor thing ! looks dejected, does she ?—poor soul, I pity her from my heart already ; but we'll soon cheer her up, amongst us : when is she to shine upon us ?" inquired Mr. Spritely.

"At dinner ; but I must request of you all,

not to raise any very high-flown expectations as to her beauty. The vexations inseparable from the state in which her immense property has been involved, has literally reduced her almost to a shadow; in fact, when I looked at her, I thought her absolutely an old woman. When she explained to me what she had lately endured, I was but too well able to place to that account, the almost haggard expression of her countenance."

"Interesting creature! what amiable sensibility!—but she'll soon recover her spirits and good looks, in our company, and this salubrious air—hey, Hunter?"

"It will be needless to point out to your good taste, gentlemen," proceeded Mrs. Stonecroft, "the delicacy of abstaining from any allusions respecting fortune, law-suits, and all those kind of subjects—tender ones, of course, to our poor sufferer: her mind will in time—"

"Oh, trust us, trust us, my dear Madam: for my part," said Hunter, "when I have good authority for relying on satisfactory information, in that respect, I never breathe the word *money* to the damsels themselves: poor dears, it only alarms them."

Two applications made at Miss Corner's door were received by a distant half-smothered voice, saying, she had lain down, but would be quite ready to join the family party at dinner. Six o'clock, therefore, came, without a second interview having taken place between the ladies; and, to the imagination wholly it must be left to form any conception of the universal astonishment produced by her entrance to the saloon, where unconquerable impatience to behold the "fair sufferer" had assembled every member of the family for even twice the ten tedious minutes preceding the announcement of dinner.

Picture to yourself, reader, a tall and upright figure, attired in the clearest of that muslin called, for its excellence, "book," whose ample folds, both above and below the slender waist, were fashionable, though evidently sustained by the never-failing resources of wadding and padding: nay, so small in circumference was the said waist, that a tolerable judge of anatomy would at once have pronounced it an impossible state of conformation with the contingent plumpness of appearance. The dress was just high enough,

by joining company with a profusion of beads, chains, crosses, &c. to cover the bones that lay between it and the throat. Here a less conquerable difficulty presented itself, in an extent that must have been vulgarly termed "scrag," had it not been partially retrieved by ear-bobs, and a profusion of ringlets kindly concealing its grossest faults. Above this, towered an abundance of hair—real, or acquired—is not for the world to inquire—comprising sundry bows, plaits, knobs, and other indescribable appearances. The meandering course of a narrow brown ribbon might have been chosen, to contrast becomingly with the flaxen locks; or it might answer the more useful purpose of covering the junction of the various component parts of this elaborate head-dress. But what words can describe the speechless astonishment of the whole company, when, in addition to this studied dress, appeared, surmounting the throat of fluted skin, a bare-faced mass of undeniable rouge, on the wrinkled cheeks of the "dejected" and broken-spirited female they had been taught to expect! A remarkably short petticoat, and a gait

between a trip and a swing, put to flight most effectually the sympathies they had spent the morning in calling into requisition ; nor were they one jot less amazed than was their thunderstruck hostess, at the complete and almost incredible transformation which had taken place in the slattern of the morning.

Notwithstanding that art had done wonders next to impossibilities, still obstinate nature glared through all the appliances of her adversary ; and, in spite of rouge, ringlets, and ribbons, Miss Corner, could not be mistaken for other than an old woman—ay, and a very old woman.

Those of the party who possessed natural politeness, commanded a decent expression of countenance ; and those not so well qualified, followed their example : so that dinner was announced, eaten, and the party rose from table, without any remarkable breach of manners having taken place ; and, with only the unquestionable conviction impressed on the mind of each individual, that the “dejected victim of vexation,” the “interestingly - delicate invalid,” was an old, practised, and universal

**flirt, whose nearly worn-out frame required the repose and expediencies of the whole morning, to qualify her for the assumption of the girlish airs of the evening.**

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE ALBUM.

"It's very strange these people from High-hill House do not return our visit," exclaimed, for the ninth time, Miss Wiggins, who began, in the first place, to tire of sporting her best cap every day ; and in the second, to regret the hinderance her remaining so closely at home, was to various little matters requiring her superintending eye. As to venturing on leaving the house, delegating discretionary powers to the remaining sisters to send for her if wanted, she could not consider such a step by any means safe. The expected visitors might refuse to come in, on hearing that she was not at home ; or, even if they should await her return, some provoking

blunder would inevitably be committed by Peggy, before she could possibly, with all her speed, resume command of the field.

It was uncommonly provoking ! There was the recent departure of the Dobsons rendered an examination into the state in which they had left the furniture necessary, previous to giving a receipt ; there might be dilapidations and accidents to be charged for, which no after opportunity could place within her reach. Then there was the gardener, at the White-house, had actually been three days in trimming up the shrubs and flowers, whereas half a day would have been ample time for so trifling a job, with good looking after. The glazier must be sent, to repair the greenhouse windows, at the brick-house ; and how could he, or any other mechanic in Brampton, be trusted to go alone into one of the houses where there was any thing light enough to carry off ? It really was amazingly inconvenient to be thus hindered from attending to affairs of the greatest importance—at least, so thought Miss Wiggins ; and she “ wished—that she did ! they would either come, or let it alone.”

One of her desires, she at last found, was likely to be gratified—for they did let it alone ; and at the expiration of a fortnight, she determined to give up her expectations, and prepared herself to act entirely on the defensive.

“ Still, it would be as well to find out how they were going on ; if likely to prosper, or the contrary,” and on making use of her customary inquiries in this research, she had the mortification to hear that a lady had joined company with the four gentlemen—another was daily looked for—that Slopall had dined at High-hill three times within a fortnight ; and that Mrs. Stonecroft had been heard to say, “ she hated and detested all old maids.”

Mrs. Whine had gathered the last-named piece of information, and had also discovered, that the High-hill dinners were served in a style of profusion and luxury, that were likely to produce a famine in the neighbourhood. This, the Wiggenses were too painfully convinced of, to attempt denying ; they never entered a shop without seeing or hearing of some orders, in the obnoxious name of Stonecroft ; and it had twice happened, they were

obliged to dine on coarse mutton chops, because all the prime parts were bespoke for High-hill. There was not a spark of attention, or respect, remaining in any of their former adherents. As for catching hold of Fidkins, to perform the usual renovating offices, no such thing could be thought of : he was sure, either to be gone up to the House, to dress one of the gentlemen, or was busily engaged on the manufacture of some bow or bunch of curls for the lady's-maid. Once excusing himself on the plea of Mrs. Stonecroft having signified her request that he should not stir out, as it was rather probable she would want her hair dressed for an evening party.

There was no bearing such insolence. Miss Peggy took in hand the debilitated head-dresses, which she papered up tolerably well ; but with her usual ill-luck (happening, somehow, to be thinking of Dr. Slopall's nose, in juxta-position with the kitchen tongs which she was heating for the final and effective touches,) she inadvertently suffered the said tongs to become nearly red-hot. By this unfortunate oversight she burnt off the two best curls of her last new front ; and might possibly have un-

intentionally plucked all its honours from her vacant brow, had not the smell of singeing brought her sister to look after her.

Then only to think of the ingratitude of Mrs. Duds, whom they had, in a manner, raised from a state of starvation ; and had recommended to wash for all their tenants. The insolent creature positively “declined taking their linen again, as it did not suit her to have it only once a fortnight.”

In addition to these grievances, nearly all their houses stood empty ; and, what was still more annoying, the villagers began to condole with them on the occasion. Mrs. Brewster professed having tried to procure them a tenant, but that all her efforts had proved unavailing, in consequence of the over-ruling advice of the apothecary, who had almost insisted on the lady and gentleman in question, settling at High-hill : discharging their servants, and by these means, as he pointed out to them, eventually saving money and trouble.

“Now,” added Mrs. Brewster, with impertinent familiarity, “it’s not only you, Miss Wiggins, that is a loser by Dr. Slopall’s

underminding expediments ; for, as I says to Brewster, look at the difference it makes on our books : when people comes to the Mall, I says, they never feels settled for any continuance, but lives from day to day in a hand-to-mouth sort of perturbation ; and never has no stores, but comes here for liquors, and them sort of perquisites, just as they want them. Instead of that, they go up to High-hill, and there they finds all kind of feasting and delinquency, for half the money it would cost them to cultivate in one of your houses, Miss. Servants is discharged, so one gets nothing that way ; and as for the Stonecroft's drumsticks, they are so high and fine, they smokes cigars, and calls the Full Moon a 'Haleouse.' Then they've the best of every thing to go to, as far as I can propagate ; no stinting there. By all account, it's a fine expensive pridicament, and never puts a penny in our way, which is shameful, I must say ; and I declare I quite feels for you, Miss Wiggins, with all them old arks of houses, and not a tenement for any of them."

"We shall see how long it will last," replied the mortified damsels, emitting a mysterious smile.

"So we shall, Miss; I declare, I never thought of that."

It was quite true, that a clergyman and his lady had been directed by Slopall to Highhill House, in preference to undertaking all the fatigues of temporary housekeeping, during a three months' retirement from the smoke of London.

"The reverend Mr. and Mrs. Porter"—as Abraham failed not to announce them to his master, greatly to the amusement of the lady, and to the horror of Slopall, who vainly endeavoured to explain to his factotum, that clerical honours did not devolve on the female.

"I'll try and remember," promised the corrected footman. Accordingly, on their next visit, the door was flung open, and his audible voice pronounced "Mrs. Porter, and the reverend Mr. Porter."

"You insufferable blockhead! why cannot you say plain, Mr. and Mrs. Porter?"

"I can, to be sure, Sir ; but I almost think the lady won't like it."

Mrs. Stonecroft, it must be confessed, experienced some conscientious doubts as to the propriety of taking in the Porters. However, she was playing a hazardous game; and it would not do to weigh the case too nicely, so the following week introduced to her table another, and moreover, a married lady. She now considered herself most truly fortunate. The Porters were quiet, well-bred persons, fond of reading, and on that account made it a rule to remain in their private sitting-room until the dinner-hour.

This plan, though for widely different reasons, was also adopted by Miss Corner ; so that the still unoccupied hero of the moustaches, continued to sigh and fret for the return of the hoped-for Miss Winterton.

By way of procuring him a female companion, Mrs. Stonecroft reminded Mr. Sockens of her former invitation to his sister, and begged, as they now were quite settled, that she might request the pleasure of her company for a week or two ; "and pray remind

her to bring her album," said she, "it will be quite a treat to us all."

Miss Sockens with alacrity obeyed the summons. She was a pretty girl—fair, and of a languishing cast of countenance. Sufficiently attractive, Hunter thought, if he could but have found out "what she could command." She played a little—and sang a little—and painted screens—made work-bags for her female friends, and purses for the gentlemen. She confessed to have learned "every thing usually coming under the head of Fashionable Studies," and was therefore one of those many-headed monsters, "a very accomplished young lady." She set up an album, under the too-prevalent idea that all original scraps were valuable; and she hesitated not to lay a tax upon every one within her reach, that might be supposed to have talents in the arts of painting, poetry, or prose. In a visit to so varied a family as were to be met at High-hill House, she doubted not of collecting many additions to the valued volume, which accompanied her descent to the breakfast-room on the morning after her arrival.

Miss Corner, who did not greatly relish the

somewhat attractive, and decidedly youthful figure of her rival, received all her advances with the most repelling coldness of demeanour; omitting no opportunity of throwing off some sarcasm on the subjects of "bookish ladies:" and to all the flattering courtesies of the fair Sockens (who persisted in asserting her conviction that Miss Corner was, though unavowedly, a votaress of the tragic muse,) she obstinately reiterated her denial of the charge—declaring she never could read any thing but a newspaper; and the advertisements of that, only, when in search of a new habitation.

This amiable female boasted of having spent all her life in moving from boarding-house to boarding-house; having cut all connexion with family and friends, on the declared intention of spending every farthing of her own money upon her own and sole enjoyments—exempt from the tax of all poor relations, and other annoyances, as she expressed it. She had not yet, however, she owned, met with any abode in which there was not some little circumstance or other to again unsettle her; and she further declared her immoveable determination to pursue the same course

until she found one comprising all the advantages she sought. Unabashed and determined selfishness soon rendered her universally disgusting to the inmates of High-hill House ; who, on becoming fully acquainted with the despicable meanness of her every idea, with one consent united to thwart and tease her, whenever an opportunity offered and they could do so unobserved by Mrs. Stonecroft—for they naturally concluded, she would not approve of such conduct, towards one whom they believed to be a valuable addition in a pecuniary point of view. The above-named lady, however, was less obtuse in her perceptions than they imagined, but was willing to give a “blind eye” to their proceedings ; not caring (indeed, rather hoping) that they might effect the object of the generally desired removal.

Miss Corner’s wants and wishes, it soon became the chief business of each and every of her companions to frustrate. The first demand, on the commencement of the day, was, that she should be the first to be supplied with hot water ; the first to be attended by the maid whose duty it was to wait on all the ladies ; and that she should have the first cup

of tea, declaring that her comfort for the entire day was destroyed, if she did not secure the first brewing of the tea-pot.

The servants were not behind-hand in their assistance towards the general plot: consequently it invariably happened that she heard divers water-jugs, (rattled as they passed her door, purposely, to give intimation of their approximation,) long before she could prevail on Martha to bring her the requisite supply. The said Martha resolutely persisting in obstinate deafness to the repeated calls of Miss Corner's bell, until assured the tea was actually made, and that it would be therefore impossible for the "old vixen" to make her appearance before the second round of cups. Her rage and scolding fell alike unheeded on the perverse Martha; who, easily perceiving that her mistress did not disapprove of the system, invariably took the scoldings with gentle submission, urging her grief at the very natural "impossibility of being in two or three places at once."

With what face could she complain to Mrs. Stonecroft of the insolence of her servant, an interloper, as she was, on that lady's bounty?

The approach of the dinner hour renewed her hopes of enjoyment? but here again she was doomed to continual disappointments, of (to her) the most vital importance. She had not hesitated to publish what were her favourite dishes, and the particular joints requisite to her happiness; and she confessed to be so dependent on the gratification of her appetite, that she would not stay in any house where these demands were not attended to.

It became the general study, therefore, to torment and vex a mind of such selfish and grovelling propensities. And whatever else the company might forget, they took effectual care to remember the particular cuts and limbs declared to be obnoxious to Miss Corner; who, even if she spied some favourite tid-bit, half concealed beneath a spoon, could never succeed in directing satisfactorily the carver's eye to the precise object of her desire.

She protested against the admission of air into the dining-room; and required in August the stifling of every individual, during dinner, lest a chill should fall upon the dishes.

Miss Sockens was, by general petition, prevailed on to say that she must faint in a close

room, which gave the gentlemen the additional pleasure of flying with alacrity to execute the wishes of the *young* lady, to the utter disregard of those expressed by the *old* one.

Even Hunter had speedily abandoned his hastily formed designs upon the imaginary heiress, as he could not but perceive, whatever her possessions might be, she would never consent to a division of them ; he, therefore, like other disappointed men, lent himself to the popular cause, assisting to catch wasps for the purpose of exciting her terror, by confining them under glasses, until her approaching footsteps gave the signal for the liberation of the prisoners. Seldom less than a dozen of these insects were thus prepared, by previous confinement, to rush angrily towards the door, on the entrance of Miss Corner ; when her shrill screams, accompanied by the flapping of her long arms, afforded a charming source of amusement to the conspirators.

All Miss Sockens' attempts were in vain, to extract even the autograph of Miss Corner ; who, at last told the applicant, with not more truth than sincerity, that she "gave nothing for nothing."

"Mr. Spritely! then, surely you will contribute to my book; a line even, a single line, is all I ask."

"Most willingly, young lady; would you prefer a perpendicular or a horizontal stroke?"

"Ah, nonsense, now; come, you know what I mean, a line of your own composition, to be sure."

"If you can ensure its companionship with original productions only, I shall be most happy to oblige you; but, really, these collections, latterly, have been so hackneyed. I'll venture now, in twelve guesses, to name at least nine of your favourite articles."

"Oh, impossible! I tell you I have nothing that is not perfectly unique; so, guess on."

"Imprimis—the bachelor's thermometer?"

"Oh, goodness! did you ever see that—well, the truth is, I have that—but isn't it good?"

"Lines on the Forget-me-not, by L. E. L.?"

"Fair fragile weed—while thus I view."

"Now, really, Mr. Spritely, you are too bad; but those were actually written by a

friend of mine, and given to me on her leaving England."

"Epigram on a lady who beat her husband?"

"Lines on a linnet?"

"Positively, Mr. Spritely, I will have nothing to say to you: my good-for-little brother has been telling you, I know he has."

"Far from it, I do assure you; I keep merely to the 'general index;' but here comes the scribe of scribes," he continued, on seeing Dr. Slopall approach the house: "here is a man who will write for any one, on the slightest request."

"Delightful! and is he reckoned clever?"

"It's thought so: shall I apply to him, in your behalf?"

"I should be so much obliged to you; really, I cannot tell you how—"

"Not in the least: ah, here he is. Good morning, Doctor; here is a young lady I have been recommending to address herself to your good offices. She wishes you to write for her. Would it be asking too much of you, my good Sir?"

"How can you put the question, Mr.

Sprightly? Are you not aware, my most strenuous endeavours are due to every member of this charming family? The inclination to serve waits constantly in attendance on whatever talents have been committed to my charge."

So saying, the apothecary strode across the room, grasped the wrist of Miss Sockins, and, drawing her away to a bow-window at the farther end of the room, with, as she considered, a very mysterious expression of countenance, while he continued to press her wrist, and to look with great earnestness into her face,) in a low voice, slowly addressed her in the following words, "We are a leetle too rapid—we must take some medicine—we must, indeed—and, we must go to bed—we must indeed."

Unaware of his medical character, the lady was rather startled by the plural number, in which (as she understood it) the proposition was made; and hastily freeing herself from the hold of the astonished Doctor, darted to the door, in an attempt to escape from the madman, for such she firmly believed him to be.

"I protest against the Doctor's lines!" cried Mr. Hunter. "The Doctor writes Latin, Miss Sockens; and you say English alone is received by you. Now I have a sweet little poem I could give you, written by an intimate friend of mine; and I can vouch for its originality, by shewing you the very letter containing its first and only copy."

"Poetry is certainly what I most covet," replied the lady, recovering from her late alarm, on understanding the professional intentions of Slopall. "Poetry is decidedly more valuable to me than prose. At the same time, I am rather particular as to its style. You'll excuse the remark, Mr. Hunter, but sometimes, you know, gentlemen put lines in a lady's album, that, although appearing in their eyes very witty, do not always obtain favour in those of the lady."

"I flatter myself, those I have to offer will prove unexceptionable to the most fastidious of the fair sex. Allow me, previous to the insertion, to read you my friend's letter. I should preface it by telling you, that he had recently become the possessor of a sweetly-romantic estate, where I have been staying a few days with him; and

we derived considerable amusement, from listening to the crude suggestions offered by different visitors, under the name of 'proposed improvements.' The fact is, the place was perfect, but your self-created critics fancy they do not sufficiently prove their taste, in praising what you shew them; their end and aim, in accompanying you over your domain, is to point out some defect of nature, or egregious error of art, which they kindly instruct you how to obviate, or conceal.—My friend's letter was the result of some visitation of this kind, and here it is:

' My dear Hunter,

' The weather has been so desperately wet and cold, I have not been able to put my nose out of doors since you left me, and almost fear I may be induced, by a much longer continuance of the same, to exclaim, in the words of the old gardener at Beaumont, whose office it was to shew the grounds, and listen to the admiration of the delighted visitors; while, in the consequent confinement to the spot, its beauties had long palled on his senses.

Being appealed to by a sentimental young lady about the charms of such a residence, ‘Ay,’ sighed he, ‘it’s all mighty fine; but what’s Heaven itself, to be tied to’t.’

‘I hope you have not forgotten the various subjects of your admiration whilst here, and will listen to a poetic effusion that took place between two and three o’clock this morning. You will say, I had better have been asleep. I think so too—and did at the time. But, if a man can’t sleep ?

‘Well ! the subject was given me in a proposal made by Dumby (you remember Dumby) to dam up the river Bourne, which runs (or rather ‘walks’) through my demense, and, after watering the kitchen-garden, falls in trickling streams over a rock, and continues its meandering course through the pleasure grounds, forming an agreeable accompaniment to some thousands of birds, inhabiting the oaks, thorns, and chesnuts growing on its banks.

‘None but a savage could have imagined such destruction as his plan contemplated ! and you will allow that my decision on the subject, if not correct, is tolerably forcible.

' Why, good Sir, don't you dam up your stream,  
That meanders thus lazily on ?  
To me, it so easy would seem,  
The uniting these rills into one.

And then—what a 'fall' you would make !  
That rock too ! which pokes up its head,  
Would be hid by the splash it would take,  
Nobly tumbling, in one sheet—to bed !'

" What ! dam up my beautiful Bourne ?  
Lose the music of this gentle fall !  
While I lived, I for ever should mourn  
Its thin stream, and its rock—weeds—and all.  
No ! to those who are fond of ' one sheet,'  
My taste may appear somewhat rare,  
But since I put in them two feet,  
I have always been used to ' a pair.'  
Then to hide my own bonny brown rock !  
To drown the sweet song of my birds !  
You have given my feelings a shock,  
I can never express in plain words.  
He alone—who could plan such a scheme,  
Has the heart that might practise it too.  
But to think I should dam up my stream—  
No Sir,—I'll be damm'd if I do.' "

" Oh ! " screamed Miss Sockens, " there's  
an oath. What a pity—how sorry I am ! I  
think the lines so good ? but I have resolved  
not to admit any thing profane—oh, I am so  
sorry ! I'm told its quite improper to insert  
any thing like swearing " "

"My dear Miss Sockens, you mistake the thing, I'm sure," observed Mrs. Stonecroft. "Mr. Hunter is the last person in the world to lose sight of propriety; besides, I have heard very genteel people talk of dams. Lord Maryton, I recollect, brought an action against a neighbour for injury to his mill-dam. I've heard him speak of it openly and frequently in my own house. Did you not, yesterday, Miss Sockens, yourself enter into the conversation of Mr. Porter and Captain Ward, by requiring them to explain to you the nature of coffer-dams. After that, I really"—

"But mills have no souls you know, Mrs. Stonecroft, which makes such a difference."

"And is therefore the *sole* cause of your objection, is it not so?" asked Mr. Spritely.

"Oh, shocking! that's a pun—they are quite out, I am certain of that, however. A friend of mine, who is cousin to a Baronet, declares he considers them so low, he would not sit in the room with a punster."

Thus slipped time away at High-hill House, in a series of practical jokes, not unusually indulged in by that class of society, whose education, and general opportunities of polish,

having been slight, do not render their perceptions too keenly alive. It was imagined that so numerous a family must possess infallible means of keeping at bay the demon ennui ; whereas, so divided were the interests, tastes, and pursuits of its different members, that a wearisome langour was the prevailing feeling, unrelieved by the inward resources of a cultivated mind.

It is a problem, never, I believe, yet satisfactorily explained, why these medley mixtures of old, young, married, and single, should, generally, in their component parts, prove eminently unattractive. Can the cause be traced to any physical or moral action ? or has the doctrine of chances sufficient power for congregating all that is most unpleasant to our better feelings in the disjointed members of a boarding house ?

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE SAVINGS BANK.

CALLING one day, upon the friend who inhabited the Fidkins' apartments, I was received with the agreeable salutation, "Ah ! the very person I most wished to see. Poor Mrs. Fidkins has made me her confidant in a little affair, that I think you will be able to assist us in with your advice. It appears, that the poor woman occasionally receives from her lodgers a trifling sum, in remuneration of her willing attendance on them, which, under the Fidkins' system of government, she is, perhaps, justified in the attempt to appropriate to her individual benefit. She has hoarded these little gifts in some cranny, hitherto impenetrable to even the prying eye

of her mate, and under the continual fear of his discovering her hidden treasure, has formed an idea of placing it under the care of Mr. Deeds, in the Savings Bank he has established, for the accommodation, as he argues, of the working classes of our community."

"Does she fancy," I inquired, "that such a proceeding could remain twelve hours undiscovered by her inquisitive husband?"

"That's very true; I believe neither of us thought of that circumstance; which, is nevertheless, of the highest importance to the poor woman, whose humble and anxious attentions to her household, really entitle her to a superior lot than that fate has assigned her. Have you any better proposition to advance in this case?"

"I should recommend her taking her money to one of the excellent establishments of that kind, in London; but I suppose it would be impossible to evade the watchfulness of her husband, for a sufficient length of time to allow of her journey to town."

"Why, in fact, that might be accomplished just now, for the man, fortunately, has chosen

to allow himself a holiday, and is gone for three days into Derbyshire, to see his friends, as these people usually style their ‘next of kin.’”

“That, to be sure, offers facilities of serving the ill-used body; and I shall be happy to lend my assistance in so desirable a work, by giving her a lift on the coach-box to-morrow. I must go to town, on business of my own, and will see her’s satisfactorily settled at the same time.”

Accordingly, the following morning we departed, and, having obtained the proper information from my lawyer, as to my proceedings in favour of Mrs. Fidkins, I was directed by him to one of the most respectable of the numerous Savings Banks in the vast metropolis, where I became the involuntary witness of a scene that rewarded me in some degree for the act of good nature I was performing.

We were ushered into a large parlour, one side was occupied with desks, behind which were seated divers clerks, while at the other end of the room, and at a desk somewhat elevated above the rest, was stationed the

auditor, who appeared to possess a kind of superintending authority over the whole concern.

At the moment of our entrance, his attention was occupied by a party, who caused considerable diversion, not only to himself, but to every individual in the room ; some of whom seemed scarcely able to restrain their risible propensities within moderate bounds, on witnessing the consequence and importance assumed by the principal person of the group, whose claims on the treasury amounted to the sum of twenty shillings ! The party consisted of three, two females and a man, all undeniably Irish ; of the ladies, one appeared considerably younger than the other—both were but indifferently clad ; and in this respect, not in harmony with their male companion, who was attired in his Sunday suit. Advancing, with a low bow and backward scrape, to the centre of the long counter, he began as follows.

“ Please you honourable gentlemen here assembled, my name is Daniel Henessey, and I have some money in your hands, and I’m going on some business of my own a long

way down into Kent; and in case of my wanting the money out, or to put more in while I'm gone, becuse it wouldn't be convanient, Sir, your honour, to come up entirely, all the way out o' Kent, for the coach fare's a phound, an I'd be spinding money for nothing, but here's my wife, plase your honours, Mary Henessey, if you'd be willing to authorize her to receive the money."

*Auditor.* "Oh, you wish to give notice of transfer; be so good as speak to that gentleman at the other end of the room."

*Daniel.* "I ask your pardon, Sir, I will. If you plase, Sir," addressing the person indicated to him, "if you plase, Sir, to authorize my wife, Mary Henessey, (come hither, Mary,) this is my wife, plase your honour, and as I've some money in your hands—"

*Clerk.* "What is the amount of your deposit?"

*Daniel.* "A phound!"

*Clerk.* "Well! what is it you wish us to do?"

*Daniel.* "Plase your honour, I've some business of my own, down in Kent, and I wished you to authorize—"

*Clerk.* "We cannot authorize, it is yourself who must authorize."

*Daniel.* "Very well, Sir, your honour, that's what I mane ; sure, it's the same thing, to authorize my wife, Mary Henessey, to have the command of the book, while I'm gone down into Kent ; that, in case I'd want it, or she'd want it, you see, plase your honour, but I hope she wouldn't, for she's a very good girl, your honour ; (come forward, Mary,) and her mother—that's her mother, be the doore—my mother-in-law ; so, if you plase to authorize—"

*Clerk.* "I told you before, 'you' must authorize."

*Daniel.* "Oh, I see, Sir ; yes, Sir ; I authorize you to command my wife, Mary Henessey, (here she is, sir,) you authorize her to command the book ; that, in case I, or she, it's all the same, and her mother, there's no knowing what may happen, but I hope she won't, but put more in ; only, as I'm going a long way down into Kent."

*Clerk.* "I fully understand it all, now : be so good as sign your name here. Can your wife write ?"

*Daniel.* "She cannot; but, sure, it's all one. I'll sign any thing in her name, all the same. She's a good girl, plase your honours, (looking round, complacently,) and I hope she'll be stiddy while I'm gone all the—"

*Clerk,* (greatly amused.) "Oh, no doubt she will, Mr. Henessey. You are from Ireland, I think, Sir?"

*Daniel.* "I am, Sir, your honour, all the way; I'm a County Cork man: iss, indeed. I was bred an' born at a place called Ringaskiddy; and my wife, here, the same, and a good girl she is, and her mother—that's my mother-in-law, Mistress Conner, (that's her, your honour, behind;) and, now that I'm goin' down into Kent, all the way—"

*Clerk.* "I see, I see; your wife is to take care of your money. Very right, and proper."

*Daniel.* "Yes, your honour, that's it; you've just guessed it: and now, Mary, my heart, you see, you'll come to these honourable gentlemen, in case you should want money, while I'm gone so far down into Kent, becuse the coach fare's a phound, and it would not be convanient my coming up out of Kent, only, I hope you won't, but put more—"

*Mrs. Henessey.* "Oh ! I won't take it out at all, sure, I ixpect, but put more in."

*Daniel.* "That's a good girl ; she's just a pattern, your honours. Well, then, you see that you, Mary Henessey, you are to come here, when I'm down in Kent, and these honourable gentlemen will command you to authorize them to pay the money into your hands ; but I hope you won't want it out, but be a good girl : and, Mistress Conner, you understand, now, that if my wife, Mary Henessey, should require to call upon these honourable gentlemen, they are quite agreeable to accommodate her with part of this money, or the whole sum, if, supposing sickness, and I would not be coming up out o' Kent."

*Clerk.* "To be sure, to be sure ; we should be quite ready. Mrs. Henessey fully understands what she has to do. Do not let me detain you any longer, Sir. Good-day, Sir—good day."

*Daniel.* "I wish your honours all a very good day, I'm sure. You see, I'm going tomorrow, and I hope my wife will be a good girl ; indeed, I know she will, and her mother the same."

*Clerk.* "Ah! no doubt. Good-day."

The Henessey claims being heard and dismissed, to the no small amusement of the assembled audience, I soon succeeded in settling the affairs of my protegée; who returned triumphantly to Brampton, with the pleasing conviction of being the happy possessor of three pounds fifteen shillings, in funded property.

Short-sighted mortals that we are! Was it likely, nay, was it possible, that the event of my having taken the female Fidkins to London, could escape the ever-open ears of her despicable husband? Coachmen must talk, as well as other folk; it consequently came to pass, that the trip to London, of his wife, was the first piece of intelligence communicated to the barber, on his return from the friendly excursion before mentioned. The truth, and more than the truth, was laid open to the knight of the curling-irons. Report, as usual, not content with plain facts, had magnified the property of Mrs. Fidkins at least tenfold; and her exasperated lord and master insisted on what he termed the restitution of a sum, such as had never, at any one period of time, come

within the dominion of his terrified wife. The consequences were, as may be imagined, far the reverse of beneficial to either of the parties; and created such a scene of disturbance in the Fidkins' family, that my poor friend was fain to take her departure thence, without effecting the service she wished, and quite convinced of the somewhat notorious fact of its being dangerous to interfere between man and wife. The result, however, was altogether satisfactory, in one respect; for Fidkins, obstinate in his unbelief of the charge he brought against his wife being unfounded, resolved to abscond—a step not very inconvenient to him, on more accounts than one. He was considerably annoyed by petty debts, besides an arrear of five quarters' of rent due to Miss Wiggins, and that lady received the following epistle from her barber-ous (forgive us, reader) tenant, one fine morning, on descending to breakfast:—

“ Miss

“ i take this opertunity of ryten to lett you  
no hi am a going to a merry K. has hi find a

menny little things as is hunplesant in this Cingdom—amongst huthers payin of rent, a practis that bennefit nobody but ones lanlor. which is u Miss—So hopes you'll excus the freedom and as I've had resen to objeck to the late conduc of my wife Mrs. Fidkins it is mi detention to hexplore my fortin in a distant climb.—and I sarved seven year and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  abroad in my yoothe as a Wollop on teer, and ham in no doute of getin a livin and my wife ma doe as she kan for hive dun with er and turn me bak on Brampton for hever.

“ I am Miss

“ Your well wisher

“ PETER FIDKINS.”

“ It's a true saying, I'm sure,” said Miss Wiggins, as she read the above, “ that misfortunes never come single! I declare, I know not what is to be done; the whole world seems to conspire against us. Here is Fidkins run away now!”

“ Fidkins run away! what can you mean, Letty?”

“ Just what I say; and I have expected, indeed, for some time, at least, either that or

something like it; you know, we have had no rent from him for nearly a year and a half. Something must be done, that's very clear. I almost think seriously sometimes of taking Mrs. Whine's advice, and opening a boarding-house, myself, in opposition to this Mrs. Stonecroft. You see how her house fills! By advertising, I do not see why we should not succeed as well."

"Dear me, Letty, you astonish me; do you know, I never once thought of that: well! I do think I should not dislike such a thing at all; only, it would be a great care, to have to dress for dinner every day, as I understand they do at High-hill House?"

"There, now, just be quiet, and do not expose your folly further; I must talk it over with Whine—She has some little property, I believe. If I could induce her now to embark in it with us, she might in many ways prove useful. I'll see what I can make of her, on the first favourable opportunity."

With such an object in view, an opportunity of course was not long in arriving, and the old spinster began to "feel her way," as she would have said, in sounding the widow.

"I am almost inclined, do you know, my dear Whine, to take your advice respecting the setting up of a boarding-house. Our White-house is so admirably calculated for the purpose, it is quite a pity it should be standing empty. To be sure, there is one great drawback, or, I should say two, in my poor helpless sisters ; the one really ill, and the other fancying herself so. If I could meet with some clever partner, now, to join me, a clever, bustling woman, that would assist in looking into things, (such a woman, in short, as yourself, Whine,) I almost—"

"Dear Letty, nothing would give me greater pleasure : my income, you are aware, is small, and I should be very glad to assist it, by giving every exertion in my power, in return for the advantages of board and lodging."

"I did not mean precisely that," replied Letty. "The fact is, I must encounter considerable risk in commencing a speculation like this ; and it would be but fair, to expect an equal stake should be put down by my partner."

"That alters the case a good deal, my friend : I doubt if I should be justified in risking

my little property in a hazardous scheme, which would, if unsuccessful, leave me destitute."

"And I also, my dear Whine."

"True, Letty; but that would be no consolation to me. To see three of my oldest and dearest friends reduced to poverty with me, could only add to my grief, in feeling that I had not the means of assisting their distresses."

The subtlety of this argument, a little threw out Miss Wiggins. Still, she would not too easily be discouraged; and it was not until after repeated efforts to arrive at a more satisfactory arrangement, that she consented to receive the best offices of Mrs. Whine, in lieu of the substantial return comprehended under the expressive term, "bed and board."

Miss Peggy could scarcely believe her senses, on hearing the co-partners discussing their various plans and arrangements. She had, on the first mention of the scheme, considered it so alarmingly difficult and unexpected, that it was only her sister Letty, she protested, who could summon "nerve" to go through all the fatigues to be encountered in such an undertaking; to overcome the, in her opinion, hercu-

lean labours of managing servants, receiving company, marketing, paying and taking all bills; carving, and keeping alive conversation at table, not forgetting the very natural conclusion to which this last consideration brought her, that is to say, the transcendently difficult task of "dressing for dinner every day!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

## WHINE AND WIGGINS.

"Gemini stars, Sir, only hear to this—if ever I was so struck into heaps in my life—"

"Really, Abraham, I must request you to desist from this abrupt manner of breaking in upon my studies—it is extremely improper, disrespectful, and unpleasant to me; and, I do positively insist—" Dr. Slopall was here cut short in his remonstrances.

"But upon my word now, Sir, you really will be amazed this time—you will, indeed, Sir! Why, do you know, Sir, the old ladies is a-going to open a boarding-house in exhibition to Mrs. Stonecroft—and—"

"Nonsense."

" But, Sir, I had it from the best atrocity. Mrs. Brewster, Sir, had it from Molly Scrubbett, and she overheard Miss Wiggins and Mrs. Whine holding the whole conflagration about it, as she was at work in the wash-house ; and in the White-house, Sir, it's to be. Molly could not reprehend all the congregation, but she made out, that a bed was to be cribbed from one house, and a bed from another, and so on, that they might be expired to extenuate as many boarders as they could any way deceive ; and Miss Wiggins was heard to bid Mrs. Whine not to breathe a syllabus till all was ready, because, as she said, it was expederent to keep their pretensions as secured as possible, till such time as they should be quite repaired to —— some word or other Molly said she could not catch. But, no doubt, Sir, the impression was, till they were ready to immense their occupations against Mrs. Stonecroft ; for it seems, Sir, at least, Mrs. Brewster coagulates, and she had it from Molly—(only Molly being no scholar, you see Sir, she may not have reflected the very disact words;) but it seems from what I

can make out between the two of them, that Miss Wiggins and Mrs. Whine is a setting up with the detension of setting Mrs. Stonecroft down—that's what I take to be the marrow of the case, Sir."

"And a very improbable case it is, Abraham; one, at least, very unlikely ever to be brought to bear. My friend, Mrs. Stonecroft, is too well established to afford the smallest chance of her being superseded by such novices as Miss Wiggins and Mrs. Whine."

"That's what I says to Mrs. Brewster, Sir; and says I, Look what a lot of servants is up at High-hill! why 'twould drive Miss Wiggins umcompas only to see what they eat in the servants' hall. Now, is it likely, I says, Miss Wiggins should pervade a table fit for quality, that never has nothen but a steak or a chop, or may be a scrag of mutton boiled, which I knows for a fact, for Lamb, the butcher, told me himself, her bills wasn't hardly worth the paper they're wrote upon."

"Poor creatures! They have no spirit, those Wiggenses—No, it never would answer, if they were even rash enough to venture on such an experiment. By the bye, Abraham,

you did not happen to hear, from the servants at High-hill, of any probability of the Knightwell's arrival?"

"Not a word, Sir,—indeed, I asked the question plump, for Brewster was a saying to me in the course of constipation: says he, 'I don't hear disactly,' he says, 'of them titles as was talked of,' he says, 'when Mrs. Stonecroft first came down,' he says. So that set me upon my conjunctions, and I put the question point blunt, as the saying is, to the coachman, and he told me he knowed nothen; and the rest of them, I believe, were extricated only the day before they came down here. So it's incapable they should not circumvent any thing of the family—or else it struck me as rather auspicious; and I said to Mrs. Brewster, in a jugular way like, by way of seeing if she knowed more than myself, you see, Sir, so says I, 'Mrs. Brewster,' I says, 'I don't see much of signs of quality as yet,' I says, 'up at High-hill,' I says; 'and Mrs. Stonecroft,' I says, 'rather boastingly told my master how that she comprehended her house would be filled with hypocrisy,' and that Sir, means something above gentry, don't it, Sir?"

"The aristocracy, you mean, Abraham—that certainly was the idea Mrs. Stonecroft gave me; and I own, Abraham, I should be glad of a little precise information on this point, if it were to be had without appearing inquisitive, or over anxious—you understand me. I would not have you appear as if seeking information for me; but, if you could just pick up, in an accidental manner, as it were—the fact is, you see, Abraham, Mrs. Stonecroft's boarders are in such robust health as to be of no service whatever to me. Not an invalid amongst them, excepting Mr. Sockins, and he has so long been one, that he has found out how to quack himself. The maids, now, Abraham—I should think the maids would be the most likely subjects for you to attack. Have you opened no little acquaintance with any of them yet, Abraham?

"Oh, gemini grigs! Sir, it's little you knows of the likes of them, Sir—why, Sir, they're quite and quite beyond me. And, Sir, you'll scarcely believe it, but they'd be downright affronted to be redressed by such a name as maid, they says it's quite out and low; there's only one in the whole house that any

of the men dares so much as call maid—ay, or call her by her name, either ; and that's little Polly Scrubbit, (Molly's daughter,) you knows her, Sir,—she with a crooked leg, as was hired just to scour kettles, and fetch coals, and wait upon the scullery woman ; the others is all mistresses—there's Mrs. Cook, and Mrs. Upper-house, and Mrs. Under-house, that's how they extinguish them, Sir ; and then the lady's-maid (what used to be) expects to be impressed as ‘my lady's own woman.’ Then to see how they dress, Sir ! why, Sir, it's enough to testify any honest man only to look at their fallals and their finery ; there was Mrs. Upper-house, only last Sunday, a coming out of church, dropped her reddingcool, and her understrapper—if I'm a living man, Sir, it's true, she picked it up with the handle of her paddysole. My lady's-own-woman never wears nothen but silks ; and flourishes about with a cambric pocket-handkerchief, embattled all round with needle-work ; and grumbles that there's ne'er a chappy-run for her to walk out with, 'cause all the men is in livery ; and she plain up and told Mrs. Stonecroft, it was contrary to

pickett to walk with any of the promestics, unless they were allowed a suit of plain clothes for the purpose. Oh, Sir, I durst no more for to exasperate upon any of them, than I durst for to eat my own fingers."

" You mistake me, Abraham, I did not mean that you should commit yourself seriously ; but just, for instance, enter into a little innocent flirtation—eh, Abraham, you could manage that ?"

" I'm sure, Sir, I'd do any thing like, to serve you, but I'm afraid, somehow, I've no talons for that sort of work, its ticklish work, Sir ; now, do you know, Sir, there was only the other day, the Under-house came through the hall with some bed-room carpets to shake, and the footman says to her, jeering-like, ' Ah, Mrs. Under,' says he, ' you shan't shake carpets' says he, ' when you're my wife ;' and do you know, Sir, as true as I stand here, she purtests she'll take the law of him, and sue him for a bridge of promise ! Think of that, Sir, I'll do any thing, to be sure, under your cum-spection, but if its of that nature, it will be in fear and trembling ; and that's the plain truth, Sir."

"The fact is, Abraham, (and in saying as much to you, I hope you will have prudence enough to see it ought to go no farther;) the fact, as you very well know, is, I have fewer patients than I could wish."

"They keeps so aloof, Sir; if they'd only come within your reach, you'd soon make them patient enough, I warrant, he! he!"

"What I was about to observe, Abraham, is this; you have tolerably well understood, and indeed, I will say, you have often very sensibly acted up to, the little directions I have found it expedient sometimes to give you, in order to keep up a sort of appearance absolutely necessary in the profession. You have lived with me, Abraham, throughout the progress of my very successful career, and it would be idle to attempt to conceal from you, my good lad, that patients somehow or other do not pour in upon me as they, at one time did, Abraham."

"And you can't have cured them all, Sir, as one may say—can you, Sir?"

"Hem! In regard to my mode of practice, Abraham, I do not consider you exactly qualified to pass any opinion, as to what its

results may have occasionally been. I was merely pointing out to you, that I have really looked upon, and treated you as a confidential servant; and I wish to impress upon your mind, not only the prudence, as far as your own interest is concerned, of rendering all assistance in your power to the support of my consequence, but of also maintaining a strict silence towards the Village gossips, in regard to any little plan I may employ you in, towards the attainment of so desirable an end."

"Oh, leave me alone, Sir, for that!—havn't I circumnavigated the inquisitive busy-bodies before to-day? There's Mrs. Brewster, Sir, if I only goes for the dinner beer, says to me, quite cheery like, 'Fine day, Mr. Abraham; Doctor's well, I hope? Many patients down to-day, Mr. Abraham?' 'All as come, I believe, Mrs. Brewster,' says I—for I never likes to have much deluging with her."

"Quite right; quite right, Abraham. You cannot be too cautious in that quarter."

"Ah, Sir, she's a mere contentity, in caparison with Miss Wiggins—the time, you know, Sir, when you was *in* there," and Abraham looked with his most knowing of

looks : " see the catechizing I'd get there, when I'd go up with your compliments, Sir, and a brace of pigeons, may be—some little trifle that way—and I couldn't, you know, Sir, turn her off with a short answer, such as might shoot the Brewsters."

" Very true, Abraham. I see you have a very just notion in some things. Now, I want you to exercise a little address for me to-day. There's an old hare in the larder, that Deeds sent me—take it up to High-hill House, with my best compliments—and you may go in, you know, and rest yourself, or wait to see if there's any answer—it's a chance but an opportunity may turn up, of gaining some information, now that you understand what it is I require—eh, Abraham ? By the bye, I wonder what has become of Fidkins, he's late—just call there, and—"

" Ah, law, sir, I forgot him, amongst it all—why, do you know, Sir, if he ha'nt a runned a way—desponded the country, as they call it."

" What can you be talking of, Abraham ? run away ! Fidkins run away !"

" Sure as death, Sir—and paid no rent, nor

nobody—and left his wife, Sir, on the parish, or where-not, as a body may say. Poor woman, it's a sad thing for her; only, to be sure, his absence, as it were, relieves her from his presence; and, by all account, he was one of the most brittanical, overbearinest, husbands as there is, from this to himself. Yes, Sir, he's gone abroad—nothin' less would accomplish him."

"And who is to dress my wig! Abraham?"

"That's just what I said, Sir. If Mrs Fidkins had been like some women, that's not far to seek, she might have larned the perfection. They do say, Mrs. Brewster knows how to 'comb a wig'; ay, and powder it, too, when she's in the mind."

"Positively, I think matters are assuming a very unpleasant aspect. I begin to have some thoughts of the Swan River myself. But go, Abraham, to High-hill, at all events; and see what you can do in that quarter."

"And the wig, Sir?"

"Mrs. Bennet must just try what hand she can make of it, to-day, Abraham. There, now, go, Abraham, there's a good lad; and

make haste ; that is, not exactly haste, but good speed.”

“ My master is at his wit’s end, or thereabouts, I can see that,” said Abraham to himself, as he proceeded on his mission. “ Well, it’s not for me to say all I guess ; but, to my mind, it’s almost time his game was up ; only, to be sure, there’s my place ; so, in course, I shall do my utmost to export him.”

He returned, however, without having succeeded in gleaning any satisfactory information. The servants were hurrying here and there, to prepare, as they told him, for a large dinner-party, expected that day ; and it was a matter, as Abraham declared to his master, “ past all condescension, whatever could be done with the load of vittles they were making ready. I remembered your distrections, sir,” he continned ; “ and, Mrs. Upper-house happening to be in the hall, I steps up to her, and was trying my best to be agreeable, but not a word could I get out of her, in the way of civility—but, ‘ sir !’ says she—and she tossed back her head as if I’d been a chimney-sweeper, and the men all fell a laughing ; and, altogether, it quite stagnified me. So I made the

best of my way home, sir, for I saw 'twas no use to fight against the stream, like. I'll be bound to say, now, for I could see it in her imperent eyes, she would have thought cruke-legged Polly good enough for me. Oh, I forgot, sir—Mrs. Stonecroft's compliments, and hopes you remember you promised to dine there to day."

The various pieces of intelligence Dr. Slopall had heard in the course of the morning, afforded ample food for reflection during Abraham's absence. He could scarcely credit the truth of the report of Mesdames Whine and Wiggins; and as he could not rest quite easily under the uncertain impression he had received, he determined to make a friendly call on Mrs. Whine—for, truth to say, he dared not again encounter the combined bitterness of the three Wigginses.

Calling for his hat, he sallied forth towards the dwelling of the aforesaid lady; and, on being admitted to her presence, had the satisfaction of perceiving she was quite alone.

"Mrs. Whine, how do you do—how *do* you do?" it being Slopall's mode of friendly salutation to lay a strong emphasis on the 'do'

in the repeat, and one he used only when wishing to appear really anxious for your welfare.

"Dr. Slopall ! Bless me, what an age it is since you have honoured *me*, by a visit."

"Why it is so, Mrs. Whine ; to me, I assure you, it indeed appears so, but the duties of my profession occupy my time so entirely, I call nowhere !"

" You forget to except High-hill, Doctor !"

"Mere calls of business, my dear madam, I—"

"Well ! well ! I'm not going to pass judgment on you, Dr. Slopall. My poor friend, Miss Wiggins, perhaps, might be less leniently disposed ; however, I leave it between you. A man is not to be scolded into any measures—I'm aware of that, Doctor—particularly by ladies of a certain age, you know."

"By the bye, you will be the junior partner in the concern with them ?"

"What ! you have heard of it, then ; well, I thought myself it was quite useless to attempt to maintain the silence Miss Wiggins wished—and what, Dr. Slopall, do you think of the scheme ?"

"In the first place, my good lady, let me ask if you have undertaken to risk much upon the result?"

"I cannot say the risk, on my side, will be equal to that of Miss Wiggins; but you know Dr. Slopall, she can better afford to venture on such a speculation than I could. It would be a dreadful thing to me, to lose my little income."

"Such a result, I apprehend, would be by no means more agreeable to your intended partner?"

"Why, certainly, there is reason in your observation, Doctor; still it appears to me—at least—only think, Dr. Slopall, what a thing it would be for *me* to be left destitute?"

"You have provided against the possibility of such an event, may I hope?"

"Indeed, I think my arrangement with Miss Wiggins is altogether as satisfactory as I ought to expect. Her circumstances, you know, poor thing! have been in a sad declining way this some time past; and, as we are very old friends, it is but natural she should incline to let me have a better bargain than she would make with a

mere stranger ; and if she is to be ruined, it could be no satisfaction to her, pulling me down with her. For my part, I think there's a fate in these matters, and she seems so unlucky in her undertakings, that I did not like, exactly, to involve my property with her."

"I do not understand, then, what can be the nature of the partnership ?"

"Miss Wiggins, you see, must have a confidential assistant, (for those sisters of hers are mere lumber,) a person who can take the management of the house during her occasional absence, overlook the servants, and assist in regulating the family. Now, it is uncomfortable enough for me to be in lodgings alone, so I have agreed to devote my time in attending to the general interests of the concern."

"And without stipulating for any share of the profits ? Really, Mrs. Whine, this is a very friendly act, I must say, and does honour to your feelings towards those poor women ; and, if I am not impertinent, now, might I ask the sum you are to give for your board and lodging ?"

"Oh, I pay nothing ! oh, no—I consider my services a sufficient equivalent for the trifle of board. In a family, you know, one in addition, is no object—"

"That being the case, you may feel yourself tolerably secure ; for, sink or swim, it appears you can lose nothing ; and should they sink you may float off pretty comfortably, having saved, probably, a year or two's expenses."

"Exactly what I considered, Doctor ; and certainly, the most comfortable method of settling affairs."

"To yourself."

"Just so ; to *myself*, I mean."

"And the White-house, I understand, is to form the scene of the campaign ? It is very large, to be sure ; but, if I recollect rightly, the furniture is in a—I should say, he ! he !—in a rapid decline ?"

"It has, I own, seen some service ; still, by means of patching, and darning, and dipping, (Miss Wiggins is quite at home, in those expedients,) it may be made to assume a tolerably decent appearance ; and we do not intend to attempt carrying things on a scale

of magnificence equal to that of your friend Mrs. Stonecroft, whose independent income renders pecuniary emolument a matter of comparative indifference to her."

Mrs. Whine next proceeded to gather from Slopall some little insight, as to the ordinary style of dinners produced at High-hill House ; the result of which, as she declared afterwards to her partner, "all but raised the cap off her head, with sheer astonishment."

Miss Wiggins, however, was nothing daunted by this account, chiefly trusting for success, as she said, to the decidedly opposite plan she would adopt, to that practised by Mrs. Stonecroft.

Our poor Doctor was once more in a state of vacillation between the opposite factions, unable to decide with any degree of certainty as to which it would be most prudent to adhere ; —for, be it confessed to my readers, he despaired not of regaining his ground on the Wiggins' estate, should circumstances induce him to undertake the requisite trouble.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE PARTNERSHIP.

"IF I could persuade that blundering sister of mine, now to keep her room, we might have *some* chance," said Miss Wiggins to herself. "I must try and convince her she has not nerves for being constantly in company."

Accordingly, she called a council on the subject, and made it quite evident to Miss Peggy, that she never could sustain the anxiety of "dressing every day for dinner;" and it was resolved, that she should take up her abode in Miss Sally's room. The supposed requisite attendance on the professed invalid, would give (Miss Wiggins said)—"a very respectable colour to Peggy's seclusion."

This arrangement relieved the most powerful of the old lady's anxieties. Peggy's nervousness, Peggy's awkwardness, and Peggy's malapropos remarks, having haunted her poor sister like a nightmare, from the moment that their new scheme was decided on. By keeping her in the back-ground, she would have a tolerably clear field for manœuvring in ; and trusted yet to shew Dr. Slopall, he had "gone further and fared worse."

It is time, now, to give some description of the capabilities of the White-house, for the purpose to which it was about being devoted.

It was the most ancient, as well as the most spacious, of the Wiggins' dwellings, and was detached from the others composing the Mall by a large paved court, to which you descended by a flight of steps ; the said court, flanking the front and sides of the building, left the back occupied by a tolerably extensive garden, where terraces, yew hedges, and formal grass-plots, marked the period at which the ground had been laid out ; and in which primitive form (to save the expenses of modern improvement) it had been suffered to remain.

The house was of brick, and rough-cast ;

its windows of massive construction, and singularly deficient in that regularity of either size or shape, at the present day considered of indispensable importance. This was easily accounted for, on examining the interior of the mansion, where the up-and-down nature of the galleries and staircases would form an interesting subject of study, during the three first days of a person's residence there. Scarcely two of the rooms were upon the same level ; on opening a door, you were certain to have to ascend or descend a step or two into its apartment. From the principal gallery or corridor numerous other passages branched off in a most perplexing and labyrinthian style—altogether occupying as much space as would, in the hands of a modern architect, have formed a handsome suite of rooms. The chimneys were internally adorned by elaborately-carved mantel-pieces, and externally clustered closely together in friendly groups on the roof ; the corners and centre of which roofs were garnished by curiously-shaped urns of stone, various in tint and size. This house had been usually let to a certain old-fashioned cit, who revelled in the space allowed his limbs and eyes, in comparison with his cooped-up count-

ing-house in Lombard-street. He loved the place, he said, for being old, and looking old. A conjunction, he would add, not frequently to be met with, now-a-days. He even went so far as to assert that he believed it to have been built in the reign of Queen Anne, before the Rex's came to the throne of England. For the last few years, however, the ancient admirer of this old pile had been seduced by his daughters to extend his journey to Brighton ; where, as they told him, there was some chance of being seen. The White-house had stood empty, for, (to use Miss Wiggins' expression,) "It was not every body's money." In fact, it was one of those unsatisfactory possessions, coming under the penalty of all the "too's." It was too large for many, too small for some, too dark for most, too damp, too dreary, too expensive, and too shabby, for all.

Miss Wiggins saw its faults with a more lenient eye than did most other people ; and she soon brought it into a state, pronounced, by herself, "fit for the reception of any family whatever."

The next step was, to remove thither herself

and sisters, together with Mrs. Whine; and the most objectionable of the apartments having been assigned to their especial use, the organization of the household became a subject of the next importance.

Now commenced that painful trial, the struggle between parsimony and speculation.

To hear the wages asked by cooks—their required perquisites—their holidays—(an indispensable clause in the agreement)—with the demand of a separate bed-room, &c., &c., was enough, as Mrs. Whine declared, “to provoke the patience of a saint.” The damsels who “walk in silk attire,” formerly called housemaids, were not far behind their professional companions, in point of exactation.

Long and warily did the partners weigh, examine, and consult about, the numerous candidates for establishment, before they could arrive at any decision; and chance, after all, more perhaps than discretion, influenced their election. Selina Buggins was engaged in the capacity of cook, and Aurelia Stump in that of spider-brusher in general, to be aided and assisted in household matters, by the unpol-

ished Betty, the Wiggins's former servant, who had hitherto been accustomed to "do every thing by turns, and nothing well."

A slight demur arose, in the objections made by the two new-comers, to sitting down to meals with a young "ooman as was nothing but a maid of all work;" which difficulty was arranged by the "managers," recollecting that some one must remain in attendance on the Gate, during the important time of servants' dinner, &c., and the task devolved on Betty, who might be said to suffer, rather than to enjoy, the sinecure thus allotted her. Few, and far between, were the attacks upon the White-house bell; and even these, for many days, were productive only of disappointment and vexation to the heads of the firm—proceeding, as they usually did, from those merchants in brimstone-tipped missiles, who feel themselves justified in obtruding their wares by house-row.

Miss Wiggins made it a point to be dressed and seated in the drawing-room, by eleven o'clock, where, with open ears and anxious heart, she listened for each welcome peal. By the time she had disposed of some cum-

brous piece of household work, under the sofa on which she sat, and assumed her netting, the door would open, and—"only matches, Ma'am," give her the trouble of a re-arrangement, to be perhaps disturbed again for no worthier purpose. Betty's return to the kitchen was subject to an attack, first from Miss Peggy, who, with door ajar, and half a face protruded, failed not to whisper, "What is it, Betty?"

"Matches, Miss."

And away trudged Betty to the housekeeper's room, where she was assailed by Mrs. Whine, with, "Well, who is it?"

"Nothing but matches, Ma'am," was the provoking reply.

During three weeks, passed in this unsatisfactory manner, the only application in answer to their numerous advertisements, was from a widower with five small children: the same appearing to be considerably spoiled, prudence obliged the ladies to decline engaging with the parent, very naturally foreseeing that the children would form a bar to any other boarders, whom they still hoped might arrive. It would, no doubt, have contributed wonderfully to their

comfort, had they been aware of the fact, that Mrs. Stonecroft began to totter on her throne; but this was a circumstance that lady had hitherto contrived to keep within her own breast, and having, by returning no visits, constituted her family the “*exclusives*,” of Brampton, she gained the advantages of exercising her manœuvres, even there, with some degree of secrecy. Dr. Slopall, however, proved a thorn in her side: his greediness for patients rendered him far more inquisitive than was either agreeable or convenient to the lady; and it was only by means of a very lofty tone, she could keep him at bay. The Knightwells had been played out; and she found it necessary to silence the tiresome inquiries both of the Doctor and Mr. Hunter, on the subject of their return, as also of that of the heiress, Miss Winterton, by boldly announcing, that the Knightwells had decided on going abroad for three years, and that the heiress declined returning to her on the plea of her great accession of fortune having rendered it proper for her to commence an establishment suitable to it.

“ You seem to take this intelligence very coolly, Mrs. Stonecroft,” observed Mr. Spritely.

"Perhaps that may be accounted for by a letter I have this morning received from the agents of my West Indian property giving me the pleasing information that I may very soon expect remittances from thence, to be nearly treble the amount I have hitherto received. With the funded property I already enjoy, this is a matter, certainly, of no material importance ; still, we never, I believe, turn our back upon money, when offered, or think it superfluous. Ey, Doctor, what say you ?"

Slopall cogitated on the question—he gave, at the moment, no decided answer ; but the result of his deliberation was, a request for a private interview with Mrs. Stonecroft, in which he attempted to convince her how requisite it was, more especially in West Indian concerns, that she should have some male friend in whom to confide.

The lady professed entire confidence in her agents ; and the Doctor recommenced his argument with more vigour, arriving at last at the startling conclusion, that no lady possessed of the fortune enjoyed by Mrs. Stonecroft, ought, in common prudence, to remain single

—open to the schemes of every rascally fortune hunter, &c. &c.—in fine, the regard and interest which he had felt, gradually increasing from the first moment of their acquaintance, could no longer be repressed, and he declared himself (tho' not perhaps in those words) ready and anxious to take possession of herself and all her worldly goods.

The lady required time “to consider on so important a proposition ;” inwardly resolving to defer giving an answer, either way, until guided by future circumstances. The tradespeople were beginning (not to attend with less alacrity, but,) to hint that they were “making up their books,” and had drawn out Mrs. Stonecroft’s account, ready for inspection ; and some of them looked rather grave, on receiving the general reply, that “Mrs. Stonecroft disliked paying trifling bills, but would settle all demands at Christmas.” To many of the petty traders of Kingsmead and Brampton, this decision was far from agreeable ; to all, it bore, at the least, a doubtful aspect : but they had eagerly grasped at the custom of the new-comer, without presuming to stipulate for other con-

ditions, consequently were without redress. On hinting, in the servants' hall, that "a pressing payment, to be made on a certain day, would render a settlement of their account particularly convenient at that moment," they were advised, if they valued Mrs. Stonecroft's patronage, not to encounter the certainty of offending her, by any request of the kind, she having been heard frequently to declare, that she would immediately dismiss any tradesman who should commit such an impertinence. Supplies were required in profusion; and thus circumstanced, they became each week less able to extricate themselves from the embarrassment, since their only chance of success appeared in remaining obsequious until the wished-for period of Christmas should entitle them to come forward more pressingly.

"I hope you get your money from High-hill House, Mr. Cinnamon," said Miss Wiggins. Now, Miss Wiggins hoped no such thing—but she did wish, and that earnestly, to hear the grocer complain of the reverse being the case. Remembering a rebuke he had received from her on a former occasion,

Cinnamon did not, altogether, feel that his auditor would prove quite so friendly a confidant as he could wish, he therefore contented himself by stating what was given out."

"Yes, yes—so I hear—you are all in the same story. I am only thinking how wise you and the rest of the shopkeepers hereabouts will look, supposing your expectations should not be realized when Christmas comes."

"That's what I says to Cinnamon," obtruded Mrs. Cinnamon, emerging from the recess, styled parlour, behind the shop—"I'm sure Cinnamon knows I've said little else but that, since ever the first month the bills went in."

"You know nothing about it, my dear."

"But I do know about it, Mr. Cinnamon, and the whole parish will know about it, or I'm mistaken. Hav'n't I lived in the first of families—and never see such random work among the servants as is up yonder; ordering pounds of this, and pounds of that, without even so much as a check-book, or going to their mistress, or anything what's regular—and I do say, it have a very suspicious

appearance, when a lady takes no notice what stores her servants order in—and I don't like the looks on it at all, Miss Wiggins. Why, there's your bills, mem, as I says to Cinnamon—‘if they're small, still we do get the money, one time or another ; and people in business, we know, can't always command it’—we knows that by ourselves, Miss Wiggins.”

The lady thus addressed, although she had no aversion whatever to dealing in houses, was greatly shocked at being considered or addressed, as in the present instance, on terms of equality and fellow-feeling with her neighbouring traders ; she therefore hastened out of the shop—satisfied at least on one point—that both Cinnamon and his wife were far from comfortable on the subject of their new customer.

As she trudged along Love-lane, she encountered Mrs. Duds, whom she would have passed without noticing, from recollection of the delinquent's late conduct in refusing her services in the usual line. But, dropping a penitential courtesy, the heroine of the washing tub “ hoped no offence—Miss Wiggins had

always been very kind to her, certainly, and she was quite sorry for what had happened—hoped Miss Wiggins would look over it, and again employ her."

"Ah, I suppose, Mrs. Duds, now you fancy I shall have a larger family, you will be coming to court me, as you did Mrs. Stonecroft. I heard of it—just at the time, too, when you were too busy, forsooth, to work for me. Surely you can care nothing for my favour, when you have such a house as that to employ you."

"I am sorry, Ma'am, I'm sure, you should have taken offence; indeed, I know I did a very wrong thing then—but I was over-persuaded by them as didn't wish me well, may be—or I never should have thought to do such a thing to you, Miss Wiggins, that was always my friend, as I say:—to be sure, the work up at High-hill did seem quite a little fortune, as it were, to me—never axed prices nor nothing, but then, if one don't get paid, what use is it?—and a poor woman, like me, must have her money, or how can she get on?"

"Oh, ho—then you are not paid either? Upon my word, you seem all to be in the

same story. I only hope it may bring you to your senses ; and, when you are tired of working for nothing, I suppose you will all be glad to come back to me."

"I shall, for one, Ma'am, indeed ; for, as I was a saying to Mrs. Brewster, no longer ago than last night ; says I, 'it's a hard case on a poor woman, like me ; and Miss Wiggins,' I says, 'if she does screw me up, still there is her little bit of money, sooner or later,' I says."

"It would appear quite as respectful and proper, in yourself and Mrs. Brewster, to abstain from making so free with my name, or my concerns. I am sorry, Mrs. Duds, with your large family, you can find no better employment than in discussing my family-affairs in your gossiping visits."

"I defy any one to say, Mem, I ever spoke again you or Miss Peggy, or Miss Sally, though I have been by, when Mrs. Brewster, to be sure, has been a laying out finely about your housekeeping, and all that ; but I just let her run on, because, you know, Miss, she aint sober, most times, when she sets her tongue going."

"All I have to say to you, Mrs. Duds, is

this—when you thought proper to decline my work, you lost all chance of future employment in my house. I send my linen now to be washed in London, as being the only place where honesty and industry are certain of being found. I wish you good morning, Mrs. Duds."

With this addition to her budget, the spinster arrived at home in tolerably good humour. Mrs. Whine had employed the two hours of her absence, by sitting in state in the drawing-room, without having experienced even the excitement to be derived from a match merchant. Miss Wiggins's return, therefore, together with the intelligence she brought, served to ameliorate, in some degree, the ennui proceeding from the solitary stateliness in which the two tedious hours had been passed.

"I wonder if Dr. Slopall has any idea how matters are likely to end at the High-house?" said Miss Wiggins.

"You may depend on it, no, my dear Letty. I understand his visits there are even more frequent than ever. Mrs. Bennett was here, while you were out, (she came to borrow a preserving

pan;) so, I just asked her how her master was? and, from what I could gather, notwithstanding she was very cautious, I saw *that*, but, still, from what she did let fall, I can see she believes there is something more than usual on the carpet."

"Of what nature, do you suppose?"

"I am speaking to a sensible woman, my dear friend, I therefore do not fear to wound a mind of the strength of yours, by replying—marriage. Yes, marriage, I fully believe, to be the Doctor's present pursuit. Bennet is tied down to secrecy, I could see *that*: and what do you think, my dear, she asked me for, but a receipt for icing of cake! What, said I, are you going to make bride-cake, Mrs. Bennet? 'Oh, no, Ma'am—it's for a friend of mine; and I hope you'll not let master know I asked for it here.' Now, I think this is tolerably plain; eh, Letty?"

"I only hope it may prove as you suspect, Whine: and, in that case, I flatter myself I shall be amply revenged on the old hypocrite, or I'm wondrously mistaken."

"Well, to be sure; such a fury, as I put

Miss Wiggins into!" exclaimed Mrs. Duds, on placing her pitcher on the flat board surmounting the bar door of the Full Moon, a station it had been long used, at eventide, to occupy for "fulfilment." "Oh, Mrs. Brewster, I only wish you could have seen the old hag; and flounced she did, as if I wanted her work again! but I soon let her know to the contrary."

"No! did you give it her well, Duds? that's right—an old screw; so she is."

"Ah, I told her as much: says she, 'Mrs. Duds, I'm sorry for what's tuk place,' says she, 'for I sends my linen to town, and it's sadly muddled,' says she: and says I, 'there's plenty more in the place,' says I, 'besides me, I says; 'and it wouldn't suit me,' I says, 'to be screwed down,' I says, 'like I used to be by you and Miss Sally,' I says. So I goes away, and there leaves her, in the biggest passion ever you see."

"Serve her right, too; never was such a born neegar as she is; why, do you know, she only allows a pint and a half of beer a day to they three servants; cook says she can't stop, nor won't; there's no perquisites, nor no fat nor nothin': a scrag of mutton, and three

turnips for the four of 'em in the parlour to dine off, and a pound of liver for the kitchen. But, laws, I suppose they're as poor as *Jacobus*."

"That you may depend they are, and as mean, too; why, I'll assure you, Mrs. Brewster, and it's a fact, if I stand here alive, when I'd used to wash for the three of 'em, the fortnight's bill, may be, wouldn't come to more than two and sevenpence; so, I leave you to judge, and, then, such a wrangling for the odd penny—Oh, she'd skin a flint. Do you think she drinks, Mrs. Brewster?"

"Not she; she's too stingy for that; and that makes her so hard upon every body else; why, if a body believed Miss Wiggins, there ain't a sober person in the parish. I've heard how she used to grumble to Betty, that you used to singe her caps; and how 'twas no wonder, for you was drunk half your time; and, as I says to Betty, 'how is it likely, a hard-working woman like that, with such a family, could get it to drink?' and it's a shameful thing, I do say, a person can't come in here for a pint of beer, but they get's the name of drunkards directly, so it is."

"Oh, as for that, I don't valy her ill-word not a pin's point ; for only this morning, when I met her, she began to talk quite sociable like at first, and, asking me about this and that, and at last she brought up your name, and the worst word in her mouth wasn't too bad for you, you may believe that. And says I, 'Mrs. Brewster's a good friend to me,' I says, 'for whenever she haves any body a staying in her house,' I says, 'she always gives me their washing, and behaves very genteel ; and I've known her from this high,' I says, 'and never known no ill,' I says."

" 'Why,' says she, 'perhaps you'll say she don't get drunk every day of her life ?'"

" 'Yes,' says I, 'I will say it, and I can say it,' I says ; 'and them as says any other,' I says, 'they may be drunkards, or not,' I says ; 'but at any rate,' says I, 'they're liars,' I says, just so. So then, she was in a bigger passion than ever, and off she went—law, is this a true half-pint, Mrs. Brewster, it looks short, don't it ?'"

"The froth's settled while we were talking, I dare say ; but it's full measure, I'm sure of that."

"I don't believe that," muttered Mrs. Duds, as she departed; and,

"Only look at Mother Duds—she's bad enough already, I think, for she quite staggers, I declare," observed Mrs. Brewster to her husband.

## CHAPTER XV.

## LOVE LANE.

As Dr. Slopall seated himself by his evening fire, determined to enjoy a long, and, as he expected, an uninterrupted course of reflection on the past events, and in the consideration of the future; which the fates seemed agreed should terminate in marriage—that fearful, hazardous, and irretrievable step, so often contemplated, and as often abandoned by him—the door was opened by Abraham, who, if less in haste than usual, appeared in a state of the greatest trepidation. His eyes were opened to their fullest powers, his cheeks of an ashy paleness, to be likened only by the tint of his extended lips. He approached his master on tip-toe, and, in trembling eagerness, gasped

out, "Sir, if you please, I wished to speak to you, very particular: oh, dear! I beg pardon, Sir—I'm so flurried—but if you please, Sir, what I wished to ask, was, do you recollect, Sir, when I first came to excavate your situation, that I told you my name was Job—Job Smith, Sir, you know?"

"Yes, yes, perfectly well—what of it?"

"And how you, Sir, projected to Job, cause you said the villagers would call me the Doctor's jobbing man."

"Well—yes, perhaps I might, what then?"

"Only this, Sir, if you'll please to devouch the same in a court of justice."

"What are you talking of, Abraham—what does all this signify?"

"It just signalizes this much, Sir—if you'll only come forward before the magumstrates, and stake the fact, you may expedite me from a most dangerous predication, into which I have been adduced, and all through doing of your bidding, Sir, in regard of the fluctuation up at High-hill, with the maids—whew!" cried Abraham, as he wiped his face, now streaming in proportion as he warmed with his subject.

"Tell me at once, what has happened to you, Abraham—and why I see you in this agitated state."

"It's enough to cogitate any man, and that you'll say, Sir, when you hears all; but so long as you so far stand my friend, Sir, as to take an afterdavid my name's Job, I believe I shall circumference the scheming villains—Oh!"

"But what is it all about, I once more ask you?"

"Something about a child, I'm partly conflagrant of that, Sir—Oh, these women, Sir—I told you what a set of amalakites was up at Mrs. Stonecroft's—well, sir, they makes no more ado, but is agoing to make a father of me, whether or no, Sir. Oh, such a diabolical consternation as they've conjugated against poor me, that's as innocent as a baby, and innocenter. However, thanks to good luck, and Job, and all that, I have detained a propoosure of their heathenish plots, and, with your help, Sir, I hope yet to circumspect their advices."

"I wish I could find out what ails you, Abraham—have you been drinking, my good lad?"

‘Yes—he, he ! with my ears, as a body may say—and i’fackins, but I’ve drunk a dose enough to sober a man, let him be never so extosticated. But I’ll tell you, Sir, from beginning to end.’

“The end is what I am most anxious to arrive at, Abraham—I suppose, however, I must take it in your own way, and call patience to my aid.”

“And they doesn’t always come when you does call them—do they, Sir, now-a-days ?—but, Sir, I’ll tell how this filemma was brought upon me. You know, Sir, you repressed your wish, that I should try my hand at a trifle of coorting like, in a superficious manner, up at High-hill, Sir—So, as I told you, Sir, the first ditempt I made, was rather a botch. Mrs. Under-house, you know, Sir, I elated, how scornful like she took my first distresses.

“I recollect—did you renew the attack upon her then, after that rebuff ?”

“Ah, then, I did, Sir—more pity—that is, I didn’t—but she somehow, when I went up the next day, seemed civiler like—and once or twice that I tuk up a note (a sham note

you know, Sir, what you'd interdicted before you went out, with orders to follow you,) and I'd wait in the hall, to see for an answer. Well, Sir—heigho ! this Buzzlebub in petticoats, she'd come through and through, with her Mr. Abraham, this, and Mr. Abraham, that ; oh, gemini—little did I respect her base and wicked instigations. But I was on my guard too, for all her flumdudgery, for I'd no mind, you know, Sir, to be downright nabbed as it were. At the same time, remembering your destructions, I certainly did not desist the young woman's civility, thinking to pick her brains like, in a quiet way of flustring (don't you call it, Sir ?) without admitting myself, but i'faith, she's a mind to pick my brains, and my pocket too, as you shall hear, Sir. After dinner you know, Sir, you bid me go up to High-hill with a note ; so, while I waited a bit, I says to the coachman, says I, 'it's a fine night,' I says, 'yes,' says he,—"

" Abraham, I really cannot listen to you any longer, unless you will curtail your story."

" Well, sir, I'll retail it as much as possi-

ble ; but if you don't hear all the circumvention's, you'll never reprehend how I am to titivate myself out of this job. So we said, it was a fine night, and, says he, 'just fit for lovers,' he says, 'to walk out in,' he says; 'and Mrs. Underhouse and James,' he says, 'has gone for a stroll ;' well, sir—what expressed me I can't tell ; but, coming home, I must needs cut through the turnip-field above Love-lane, you know the spot, sir ?"

"I do, I do," angrily and hastily replied the Doctor ; "for goodness sake proceed, if you really have any thing to relate."

"I have sir, a deal : well, when I comes me up to the edge, just beside the lane, I hears something like two people a whispering ; and a scrounging close in under the bank, so I scorns any where to protrude my company, where it might be considered one too many, and thinks I, I'll just keep still under the shadow of this tree ; it's some pair of doves, may be, a settling the day, or some trifle of that sort, it can't argufy much, whether I am a witless of their consternation, or no ; so I squose me up close to the hedge, and the first word I hears, you may believe me or not, sir, was my own

name—That is not my own name, either, but the name I goes by ; and, if I'm a living here, Sir, it was that haridan of Babylon, as made use of it, and intends the same with me ; but my exportation, I hope, will be deep enough to circumnavigate her plan : and says she, ‘yes,’ says she, ‘Abraham will do, as well as another, for what I know ; but,’ she says, ‘mind you, James,’ (the footman you see, sir, it was with her,) ‘mind you, James,’ says she, ‘if I haves him up before the bench, and he offers to compermise, by marrying me ; I shall take him,’ she says ‘for all what's past, without I'd your promise down in black and white,’ she says : (laws, Sir, you might have pitched me down with a leaf,) and, says he, ‘no,’ says he, ‘you wouldn't do no such a thing,’ he says ; ‘for you know,’ he says, ‘I'll have you at long and last,’ he says ; ‘only it would be pitticular inconvenirent just now ; but’ says he, ‘what's this fellow's surname,’ says he, ‘for its no use going up, without a proper holt of the hawbuck,’ he says ; (if I'd a holt of you, my fine chap, thought I, I'd see it should be a proper one too,) but you shall hear, Sir, how they exceeded to lay their villany out to me. ‘His

name's Smith,' says she ; 'I know's that, for I offered to mark a hankitcher for him, on purpose to find out,' (the jade, she did, sure ennugh no later ago than last Friday,) 'well, then,' says he, 'we're all right ? only you put a good face on it,' says he, 'and I shall love you all the better,' he says."

" Well, sir, upon this it was agreed betwixt the two, that she should go up to Squire Mortimer, in the morning, for to give him the intimation to sarve a warrant upon me ; and I warrant me he does it, too, pretty nimble, for you know, sir, he's always as hard as flints with gentlemen's sarvents."

" It's a most rascally business, in truth, Abraham ; however, I trust the mistake of name, and my countenance, may bring you through ; and, of course, I shall exert all my influence, particularly since you assure me the danger has been encountered owing to your zeal in my canse, and nothing farther. You are certain of that, eh ! Abraham ?"

" Of that I can take my Bible-oath, sir ; and, indeed she's not the sort of a sweetheart for me, nor never was ; she's

too full of her jiers, and her conugallity, for me.

“ Well, well ! go to bed, Abraham, and think no more of the matter till to-morrow.

Abraham went to bed as his master advised; but, to drown thought, was a matter not so easy of accomplishment. He turned, and he twisted, he tried to sleep, and he tried to remain awake; he could do neither; the uncomfortable state, between both, was one he could not extricate himself from. Awake, Squire Mortimer and a pair of bailiffs were present to his imagination; the vision, on his falling into a doze, resolved itself into a perspective view of Brampton church, the magistrate having assumed the canonical robes, and the two attendant bailiffs being transformed into the clerk, and that necessary appendage, the bride's father; a cold perspiration bedewed his whole frame as the scene became depicted in more forcible horrors, on the Bride (whose face he could not see,) seizing him by the arm, in an attempt to drag him to the altar.

“ I won't ! I tell you I won't,” shouted Abraham, endeavouring to shake himself free from the grasp of his persecutor. A still

stronger grasp, and a considerable shake of the shoulder, caused the sufferer to open his eyes, when he found himself in the clutches of Mrs. Bennet.

"Why, Abraham!—Abraham, I say, here's a pretty time of day for you to be snoozing in bed; there's not a knife cleaned; your master's shoes unbrushed; the surgery not dusted out nor nothin' done; and two men at the gate, saying they must see you instantly, on most important business."

"Oh, laws! oh, dear, Mrs. Bennet, whatever shall I do? how can I ever get over it?"

"That's what I want to know, and told them so; we've no second man, as I observed, to do his work; and it's what he can't be spared, nor can't possibly be expected, till his morning work is done; and then, to be sure, if master choose to let him go a galavanting, it's no business of mine."

"Galavanting! Mrs. Bennet, it's little you inspect—and what did they say? Oh, gemini, I'm so hot!"

"Said 'you must go with them, at once, shoes or no shoes; master, or no master.' You know best, Abraham, what you have been

about, to bring such gentry to our gate—but they look to me, for all the world, like Bow-street runners. However, get up quickly—what are you shivering at?"

"I'm so cold. Oh dear, Mrs. Bennett."

"Dear me no dears, but dress yourself, I tell you, and go down to answer for yourself, with your 'so hot' and 'so cold'; while I attend your master, and hear what he will say on the subject."

The housekeeper departed, and with trembling hands poor Abraham proceeded to assume his scattered garments, and produce himself, at the requisition of the pair of particularly ill-looking persons, who awaited his coming with signs of some impatience.

"Come, young chap—you're wanted up at Squire Mortimer's. Why, you look scared!—didn't expect us so early, may be, eh?"

Abraham was dumb. So disturbed had been his slumbers, so confused his waking moments, that he did not retain the presence of mind which would have dictated the question, "Who is it you want?" He was speechless, confounded, and horrified. Thus it happened—as Abraham, he had, by Mrs. Bennet, been

summoned, and as Abraham accordingly he went.

"A shy bird this, I'm thinking," whispered one of his conductors, winking to the other.

"I'm doubtful—it's either that, or he's up to the trick—I'm always doubtful of your close-mouthed ones."

"How stand your pockets, young fellow? this will be an expensive lark, it strikes me."

"Will it?" said Abraham, who now was beginning to recover his faculties, and by the recollection of all that had passed on the evening previous, was fortunately impressed with a feeling of caution towards his companions, who, as he easily perceived, were attempting to sift him.

"'Will it'—humph, mighty chary of your chat, young fellow—we shall see what Squire Mortimer will get out of you."

"Shall you?" echoed the prisoner.

"'Shall you,' and 'will you'—I'll tell you what it is, young man; you, may be, would have lost nothing by something of a freer touch of the tongue—but take it your own way, it's no odds to us, we only meant a little friendly

civility ; but I dare say, you are as well satisfied without it. No doubt, you know what business you are upon, and have your story all cut and dry."

" You'll see," retorted Abraham, " when we come to Mr. Mortimer."

The men now maintained a sullen silence, making no farther attempt at conversation, even with each other ; and on arriving at the mansion of the magistrate, the trio were admitted up a back staircase into a small closet-like apartment adjoining the justice-room ; where they were destined to wait the appearance of the fair accuser who was to confront the prisoner.

Some twenty minutes having escaped in this chamber of suspense, Dr. Slopall had gained time to follow to the rescue, Mrs. Bennett having given him information of the state of affairs. He arrived at the grand entrance at the very moment when the prisoner (to which name poor Abraham quailed as he answered) was ushered into the awful hall of justice ; where, on one side was seated the worthy magistrate, while on the other, and immediately opposite the door

by which Abraham entered, stood the accusing angel.

Her attire was of that silk, called, by merchants' apprentices, Gros-de-Naples ; in colour and form it precisely accorded with the fashion of the day. A satin bonnet of many colours, and profusely trimmed, adorned her head ; a black lace veil depending from which, concealed that part of the face where her blushes might naturally have been expected to appear.

On taking their respective places, Mr. Mortimer, addressing the female in a low voice, and directing his eyes towards Abraham, asked her, “ Is this the young beau you expected to be brought here to meet you ? ”

“ That’s the young man, sir—your worship, that I came to swear——”

“ Stay, stay—that’s sufficient at present—we are not come to the swearing yet.”

“ Abraham Smith”—he proceeded, in an audible tone—“ Abraham Smith, come forward.” Abraham stirred not, but, turning his eyes towards the door, as if in expectation of some person’s entrance, he awaited the third summons from the magistrate ; when, taking

his eyes from the door, and causing them to perform a tour of the room, he with tolerable calmness said, "He don't appear to be forthcoming, please your worship."

"How is this? Let the woman be sworn. Now child—there, sit down—give her the book—Yes, I see—Abraham Smith, you say, young woman, I think—"

"Yes, your worship—I've taken my oath, and he can't deny it."

"Abraham Smith," once more vociferated Mr. Mortimer—"Pray, young man, how long do you intend amusing us with this farce? When do you propose to favour us by answering to your name?"

"As soon as ever your Worship likes to call me," replied Abraham, rousing up all his courage to the test—"for I'm wanted at home, and can't well be spared."

"Come, come, Sir, effrontery will not pass for innocence here. You are Abraham Smith, I believe?"

"No, your worship—Job, my name is; there is one Abraham Smith, at Kingsmead, and there's two down where I come from—it's a common name, is Smith, and a brother

of mine was christened Abraham, 'cause father said there should always be three of a sort in a village. There's no Smiths at Brampton, but that argues nothing, your worship—it's a great name all through the county, besides."

"And you swear your name is not Abraham Smith?"

At this moment Dr. Slopall entered, and, having some previous acquaintance with the puzzled magistrate, he requested a few minutes' conversation aside—in which he apparently succeeded in throwing a more satisfactory light on the matter. For, returning to the table, Mr. Mortimer once more induced the young woman to protest her first accused and pretended lover to be the whole and sole object of the information laid against him. Upon which, addressing the prisoner, he said, "Young man, you are perhaps furnished with a certificate, proving the fact of your real name—and, if so, I beg that you will produce it, and thereby matters may be cut very short."

"Master has a paper," replied Abraham, "that was sent up from my parish, when I was drawed for the militia, if he has not designed it to the flames."

“Here is the certificate, Mr. Mortimer; I hope it will be quite sufficient to prove to you, that my servant is not the person specified in the indictment. This name you see here, is Job Smith, of Upperton, in the parish of—”

“No more, my dear Sir—no more whatever, is necessary. It is quite clear, young woman, you must be mistaken, either in the name or in the person of him you accuse. Now, as you persist in swearing positively to the name, which, on evidence, it appears differs from the person—it is quite certain, the prisoner, Job Smith, is innocent of the charge brought against him. Job Smith, you are discharged —you may retire.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE STEAMA-MECHANICO SERVITORS.

Is there any one, gentle reader, whose painful duty it has not been, during many a weary morning visit, to listen to the history of the various crimes and misdemeanours committed by servants, under the dominion of all the varieties of notable or of careless housekeepers ? There can be no person who has, at all times escaped such infliction, and the familiarity of the subject goes far to prove that there must be a fault somewhere ; whether proceeding from over-education, or from under-care, is difficult to determine.

Servants, from time immemorial, have been complained of. Formerly they were stupid and ignorant. Education became fashionable,

but appears, in some measure, to have fallen short of the expectation of the philanthropists. They have succeeded in making very accomplished readers, and writers, and poets, from that class born to the duties of menial occupation, and are now angry, and even blindly surprised, that Betty occupies her time in "communicating her inmost thoughts" to some dear friend, who is required to reply immediately to a tissue of sentimental nonsense, written, as she assures her correspondent, "when all but herself and the moon have sunk to repose." One of the heavy charges now brought against this suffering race, is, that the twopenny postman is never from the door, in consequence of their universal literature ; and its abbreviation of 'litter' throughout the house may be easily accounted for by these means. A person cannot work and play at the same time. Besides, as Mrs. Modish says, "It's excessively unpleasant to hear those well-known rat-tats at the door—who knows but that we are supposed to be receiving letters by so vulgar a conveyance. I declare, I was perfectly shocked the other day. The Duchess of Listless was here when one of

these undeniable raps was heard. ‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, ‘there’s the post—how charmed you must be; one is always glad to have letters from abroad; by the bye, though, it is too late in the day for any thing but the twopenny.’ I thought I should have dropped, my dear, and muttered something about its being a mistake.”

“And I am sure,” chimed in Lady Dote-onall, “no one knows what I suffer, by the same grievance, with my very numerous family, scattered too, as its members are, over all parts of the globe. My sister, in Spain, you know, is in delicate health. My poor father, a great age, you know, he is,—one never feels secure—at his place in Gloucestershire. My eldest son at Oxford; two others at Eton—(and those boating parties keep me in perpetual hot water,) to say nothing of three nephews in India, who may be all or any of them dead, or promoted; it makes me quite nervous to hear the postman in the neighbourhood; and when he comes to one’s very door, it really is something I cannot describe, what I suffer. My people have orders to announce to me the

result immediately ; and I do assure you, that ninety-nine times in a hundred, the disturbance arises in the literary propensities of the servants."

"Then as for needle-work," cries Mrs. Mendall, "one never gets a stitch done. They don't even find time to mend their own stockings. I cannot think how it is, for my part."

I have heard it suggested as a probable cause of the present degeneracy of servants, the difference to be observed in the matrons of the present day from those of former ages. Then, a lady took her station in the hall surrounded by her maids, whose household affairs she had previously inspected ; and an early dinner secured a long portion of the afternoon and evening to be employed by the assembled damsels in the different tasks of white-seam, spinning, &c. under the eye and guidance of a sober-minded mistress, who drove not in parks, neither spent her nights at the opera ; but found sufficient relaxation in sharing with her children the healthful exercise of walking in her own domain, or of presiding over the evening amusement of

a homely country-dance, joined in by the entire family, from the Master of the house down to Cicely, the dairymaid.

Nor were the pursuits of the female nobility of former ages, entirely useless, although they might not embrace the mere superintendence of every-day occurrences. Do we not frequently see in ancient mansions, and baronial edifices, the produce of their long and patient industry, displayed in laborious, and often graceful pieces of embroidery; evidences which ought to rouse the blushes of simpering misses, who "wonder how people of rank could ever find time and patience for such monotonous employments;" and do not reflect, or have never been told, that in such occupations they were assisted by numerous young females, looking up to them for employment and support; who enjoyed the double advantage thus, of gaining habits of industry, while they were effectually preserved from witnessing, or being exposed to, the occasional depravity of the male servants.

Educate the poor, as much as you will, or can, ladies—but the more you enlighten their minds the more essential it becomes that

your presence and example should regulate the conduct you make still more responsible in a reflecting being, than in one from whom manual labour is the principal virtue to be expected. Consider the unreasonableness of your expectations, if you content yourselves with placing within a girl's reach the means of literary attainments, and expect that they should form in her opinion a secondary employment, to the more useful labours of the needle and the scrubbing brush. Nor should I say you can, by any pretence, presume to correct Betty, on the conviction of having absented herself many hours beyond the time professedly allowed, so long as you persist in passing your own nights in a continued course of dissipation.

But these common-place—because often repeated reflections, lead me from the point which caused them. I was about to relate the sufferings and perplexities of Miss Wiggins, in consequence of the march of intellect having rendered the menials of our time, a race to be most especially feared and astonished by.

Miss Wiggins, it is true, had often per-

formed the part of audience towards different of her neighbours. She had heard relations of every ‘terrible,’ ‘horrible,’ ‘provoking,’ and ‘abominable’ thing that by possibility could be done, or be left undone ; but Miss Wiggins’s sympathies laid not on the surface. The catalogue of crime had passed before her mental vision, unfelt, and heard only as a murmuring brook. She hugged herself in single blessedness, hearing every one wind up their lamentable story by exclaiming—“those who had the fewest of these necessary evils, were the best off.”

Miss Wiggins had but one ; ergo, she was as much to be envied as she could well expect to be ; but since the opening of the White-house had rendered an increase of establishment indispensable, deep and strong were the sources of annoyance daily to be endured from the two fine females she had adopted, (we now never use the harsh word—hired.)

A long fortnight did Miss Wiggins endure their insolence, idleness, and affectation, at the end of which time she replaced them with two others, equally affected, idle, and insolent. These were suffered nearly a week, when Mrs.

Whine declaring them totally unmanageable, a council was called, at which it happened Miss Peggy was present ; who, although quite unable to aid and assist in the often-repeated demand of " What was to be done ?" remained a mute and terrified auditor of the dreadful state to which improvement had brought the lower classes. The subject, however, occupied her mind by mere dint of alarm ; and without the slightest idea that she could be of service in the matter, she rambled out towards Kingsmead, and as naturally sauntered into the library, for the useful purposes of rest and gossip.

" You look quite pale and fagged, Miss," observed the dispenser of novels.

" I dare say I do ; really, my poor nerves have been so disturbed before I came out, that I feel quite ill."

" Bless me, Miss ! nothing serious, I hope," (N.B. it was quite as essential to the inhabitants of Kingsmead to collect the news from Brampton, as it was for the Bramptonians to travel on a like errand to Kingsmead.)

" Indeed, Mrs. Cards, it is a serious matter, and a very serious matter, to think of the

dreadful state to which the rage for education (Mrs. Whine says it is) has brought the lower orders."

"Oh, mem, it's them national schools, I'm perfectly convinced—that's where the mischief lies."

"Yes and thieving, as well as lies," interrupted Miss Peggy; "and such extravagance,—why, do you know, that yesterday Mrs. Whine went into the kitchen, and she found the fire piled up into the chimney, two men sitting at tea with the maids, and nearly a half-quartern loaf cut down into bread and butter, for the cormorants."

"Ah, that's the way the houses get's robbed."

"And when Mrs. Whine mentioned her displeasure at such proceedings, they told her plainly, they never stayed in a place where they might not receive their friends whenever they pleased; and that it was a hard case if their tea was not allowed them, for that they had never had what could be called a dinner since in the house they'd been. Only think how shocking!"

"And not true, either, I dare say, mem?"

"Indeed, no ; they have devoured quantities ! we had a whole loin of mutton for our dinners, the remains of which ought to have been sufficient for the three servants. They cannot eat all that disappears ; they must give it away : I often hear rings of the bell, and see shabby people go from the gate ; but, if I ask what it was, I never get any other answer than 'a man with matches,' or 'a poor woman with matches :' and what can you do ?"

"I beg pardon, Madam," interposed an equivocally-attired individual, laying down the newspaper, with which he had apparently been occupied during this discussion ; "probably, Madam, you may not have heard of a recent invention, of my own, in fact," he added, bowing, and, with one hand placed on his breast, "an invention which, I flatter myself, will, when it becomes known, entirely extricate all housekeepers from the sources of annoyance and imposition of which you complain."

"Bless me, Sir ; that must be a valuable invention, indeed ! May I ask you to explain it ?"

The person thus addressed, and already

described as of doubtful appearance, was one of those half-cast class of beings coming under the denomination of shabby-genteel ; that is, such might have been pronounced by the observer of outward forms ; and poor Miss Peggy saw not below the surface. A person of deeper discernment would have discovered an expression, not prepossessing in the countenance ; a mixture of cunning and disappointment, which had seemingly worn it's owner to the bone, or very near it.

Miss Peggy turned her eyes on the person of the speaker ; she saw a rusty black coat, with still more rusty continuations, terminated by a downright shabby and threadbare pair of gaiters ; she saw linen of a pale coffee-colour ; and she saw no gloves ; and, even to Miss Peggy, these were proofs that the gentleman was no gentleman ! In the face, she was accustomed to look, principally to assist her calculations as to age ; but, in the case of a man in rusty black, and without gloves, it could be of no importance whether he was old or young ; so she begged he would explain to her the nature of the invention he had mentioned.

"It has occurred to me, frequently," began her narrator, "to be a distressed listener to complaints of the same nature as those from which yourself and family are, with the rest of mankind, at this moment suffering; and, from the universal report of mistresses, it becomes evident there is no such being extant as a good servant."

"Dear, how dreadful! I believe you are right, Sir: nevertheless, how will things end?"

"In consequence of my observations on this alarming subject, I have been led to make experiments, in the hope of producing some substitute for these necessary evils which at present beset us."

"How benevolent an intention!—but I cannot imagine how such a thing may be brought about?"

"I will render the matter clear to your perception immediately, Madam; and, in so doing, I hope to add your approbation to that of those titled persons to whom I have already explained my invention."

"Really, Sir, you are very polite; one never

hears of any novelty at Brampton. My sisters will be delighted, I'm sure."

"A novelty of this important nature, I flatter myself, will not long remain unknown to any part of the united kingdom. And when I anticipate, in the course of a few, a very few months, to congratulate the ill-used mistresses of careless cooks, gossiping housemaids, and saucy footmen, on their emancipation from these torments; I think I may fairly assume for myself no small portion of honourable praise."

"Indeed, you may, Sir. Such universal benefit as it will produce—I'm sure I do not know how we can be grateful enough for your exertions."

"Madam, you do me no more than justice. The Duke of Wellington may be a very clever—a very worthy man; Sir Isaac Newton by some has been thought a surprising genius; but I doubt if my ambitious hopes will be satisfied to enrol my name with either of these distinguished characters, for the admiration of posterity."

"No, upon my word I think you are quite right—so very useful—but I long to hear the description."

" My name, I should tell you, Madam, is Water Coke. I have had considerable experience in steam and gas; and, from my profound and scientific sources of observation, I am quite convinced that it may be possible to entirely abolish the use of servants, by placing it within the power of every lady, in the short space of five minutes' daily attention to the machinery of her household, so to regulate her domestic affairs, as to produce every requisite, with comfort and harmony to herself and family."

" Good gracious! but you surely would not introduce a steam engine into the house! I should be frightened to death."

" Not one alone, but as many as the size of the family might require," replied Mr. Water Coke, smiling; " and that without any danger of explosion; but, on the contrary, with the certainty of effecting a degree of unity and concord at present unknown in the culinary region. My invention I have styled the Steama-Mechanico-Servitor, and, by bestowing unlimited pains on its construction, and by deep research in the science of mechanics, I am proud to say, I have, nearly ready for the in-

spection of the world, models of the steama-mechanico cook, steama-mechanico housemaid, steama-mechanico footman, coachman, &c. &c."

" Well, I never heard such a thing in my life!—how astonished Letty will be! But, pray, Sir, how are these machines to be set agoing?"

" When closed, or stopped for the night, it will be merely necessary to indicate, by an arrangement of figures on the dial-plate affixed to each machine, at what hour they are to re-commence operating on the following day; for instance, before going to rest I set the steama-mechanico cook at six, and the steama-mechanico housemaid at seven; by this means, I ensure the preparation of hot water, to be brought up, on the first movement of the steama-mechanico housemaid. This is quite clear to you, I imagine?"

" Ye-es—I think so, Sir—how I wish my sister Letty was here!—I've no great head, and my poor nerves—"

" Well, Madam, this being accomplished, the lady of the house, on descending to breakfast, will find every thing prepared for that

meal ; after which, she has merely to set the tables, as it is termed, of each servitor, in order to dictate the orders to be observed throughout the day."

" Suppose she should change her mind, though ! ladies do sometimes, you know."

" Why—hem !—that's true ; but all that will be provided for, in the complication of machinery ; indeed, so resolved am I to render my servitors perfectly adapted to their relative situations, that I spent an entire fortnight in discovering the best method of causing the steama-mechanico housemaid to hang its head, for any given time, out of the attic window. It was a whim of the Duchess of Do-little's, who declared it would not be complete otherwise. In the machine I am making for her grace, there are to be introduced five-and-fifty curl-papers on the head of the servitor ; as the Duchess expects great diversion from the likeness to life being undeniable."

" How wonderful ! I should be so afraid of their blowing up—going off, you know."

" Not half the chance with these, Madam, as with their flesh and blood prototypes—he ! he ! Nevertheless, I am quite sure, to such

perfection is science and machinery, and all that sort of thing, brought, that I could succeed in producing a mimic-flirtation between the steama-mechanico cook and coachman, or the steama-mechanico footman and house-maid."

"Oh, Sir, you really—"

"Excuse me, Madam; let me farther explain to you the construction of these machines, and you will perceive it to be the easiest thing possible. I wish I had my models here."

"I wish you had, I declare," quoth Miss Peggy.

"Possibly I can render the process clear to your rapid comprehension. The model of the steama-mechanico cook has certainly something clumsy in its appearance, occasioned by the complicated nature of the works necessary to this servitor, in comparison with those whose duties are chiefly locomotive; the machinery is carried down nearly to the ground, as, it was considered, its operations being confined to the ground-floor, it would be sufficient to place the main body on castors. The science of gastronomy confessedly re-

quiring stronger powers of memory, skill, and judgment, than the more simple offices of cleaning, &c., advantage was taken of the absence of legs, to introduce a quantity of wheels, springs, and so forth, that would be useless to the steama-mechanico housemaid, which, in its representation of a body without a head, is quite complete, by means of the hollow bust placed on its shoulders ; and of which busts, a variety are in my ware-rooms, to suit the various fancies of ladies ; some of whom are as positive in their requisition for pretty housemaids, as others are the reverse. The natural robustness, usually acquired in the culinary profession, will, I anticipate, account for the necessary bulk of the steama-mechanico cook."

" Oh, certainly," said Miss Peggy—who never presumed to contradict any assertion, however incredible it might be.

" You would be amused," pursued Mr. Water Coke, " at beholding the motion of the servitor housemaid—it is beautiful—what I call perfect grace ! with broom in hand, sweeping out a room—or tossing a bed. I must not omit to mention also, that to this

figure appertains a warming-pan, to be set at the discretion of the owner, and which is constantly heated by the fire in the servitor."

"Another and striking advantage of my invention is, that ladies may choose the different dresses of their servitors, and need no longer be offended and insulted by seeing every new cap and gown they sport, closely copied on the following Sunday, by their attendants, the style and quality of material but too often on a more expensive scale than those of their mistresses."

"It may, and I have no doubt will, form a matter of serious and melancholy deliberation, as to the question of what is to become of the accumulation there will be of our present live lumber. Work, they cannot—and starve, I fear they will not—but, as a very sensible friend of mine observed, in the time of the scarcity, when bread was two shillings a loaf, 'Such a fuss,' said he, 'as there is about what the poor are to eat—I say there's plenty of them, let them eat one another.'"

"Oh, that's rather shocking, too!"

"Not at all, Madam. Ask their mistresses; and if you can hear of any one living servant

declared to be better worth—I'll eat her myself."

"I'd give anything my sister Letty was here, Mr. Water Coke. I am certain she would be delighted to hear your account of this extraordinary machine—and indeed, I think she would like to bespeak a couple of them to be made for us. You see, Mr. Coke, we are setting up a boarding-house, and are fairly teazed out of our lives by the servants one gets."

"I shall have great pleasure in calling on any friend of your's, Madam, to offer the information which has given yourself so much pleasure. Where may I find your sister?"

Miss Peggy, considering the urgency of the case, surmounted the diffidence that would otherwise have prevented so decided a step on her part, as the introduction of a stranger into the family—gave the address. Upon hearing which, the man of steam exclaimed, "Ah, the Mall! a sweet situation! the fact is, I am looking for some quiet spot, wherein to repose after the labours of the last six months" (he omitted to name the scene of those labours—being in a certain well-known

building at Brixton, to which he had been consigned, in consequence of some swindling transaction.) “Probably we may come to some arrangement, by which both parties may derive advantage. Money, with such a capital as I possess, is no object. I will provide a set of servitors, and remunerate myself in occasionally taking up my quarters with you, for a month or so.”

“How extremely liberal! I am quite anxious for my sister to see you, Sir. I confess I have little or no voice myself in her arrangements—but I will prepare her for your visit.”

I question if it had ever before occurred to Miss Peggy Wiggins, to enter her house under such agreeable feelings of self-satisfaction as pervaded her mind on this occasion. Scarcely could she command breath to relate the wonders she had collected in the library at Kingsmead; and long did she labour to convince the partners, of the reality of what had passed between herself and the clever stranger.

The following day, however, he presented himself to the assembled ladies, whom he obliged with an equally minute description of

his wonderful invention, to be ready for use in “less than a month.”

Miss Wiggins, it is true, paused upon the offer of his domestication at the White-house; for, as she declared after his departure, the man looked more like a thief than like a genius; and it certainly was suspicious, his desiring their secrecy on the subject of his servitors. She was, however, in this instance, overruled by Mrs. Whine, who, to her remonstrance on his threadbare equipments, urged, that she considered this the most satisfactory proof of wealth, for that “poor dear Mr. Whine was used to say, ‘no man possessed of less than thirty thousand pounds, would ever presume to wear a ragged coat.’ ”

“Well! I give in to you both, because I know nothing better to be done—but, remember, I have no faith whatever in this man, nor in his invention. It is too good to be true, and I expect we shall be swindled out of our board and lodging—however, take your own way this time, just for peace sake.”

That evening saw Mr. Water Coke established in one of the numerous bed-rooms at the White-house; where he passed three

weeks in a state of almost perfect seclusion—never leaving his room, except to join the family meals, under the pretence of “ delicate health and studious habits.” On which Miss Wiggins rather peevishly remarked, aside—that “ for a sick person, she had never seen one with a better appetite—and, as for occupation, she verily believed he never took his hands out of his pockets but at dinner-time,” &c. During this period, Wiggins and Co. were led on, by the promise of the new servitors, to submit to all the extravagance and impertinence of their servants; being assured by Mr. Water Coke, that they should be the very first to be supplied.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE ARREST.

To complete the picture of the affairs of my Village, it is necessary to proceed from the Mall to High-hill House.

"I don't half like the appearance of things here lately," said Mr. Hunter to Mr. Spritely ; "No additions, you see, to the family ; and I have once or twice passed through the hall, when trades-people appeared to be waiting to see Mrs. Stonecroft, who was, I strongly suspect, denied to them."

"To confess the truth," said Mr. Spritely, "my own suspicions have been rather awakened, by several circumstances that bear a decidedly doubtful aspect. I also have noticed

those gentry of the counter, with white aprons and long faces, who frequent the hall about the natural pay-hour of the day ; and whom I have often seen, ay and heard, take their departure in a discontented manner : indeed, yesterday I was a little startled, on coming home, to perceive two shabbily dressed men hovering about the gate, who inquired of me if Mrs. Stonecroft lived here, and if she had not a couple of saddle-horses in the stable ; to which I replied, that one of her boarders had. ‘That will do as well,’ answered one of them ; ‘it is for rent we want them ; and, boarders or lodgers, they will be seized, unless steps are taken before Saturday.’ Now, as the horses, you know, Hunter, are mine, I lost no time in directing their immediate ‘steps’ to be retraced to their old stables in London, where I intend they shall remain for the present. Having nothing of great value on the premises, I am inclined to see how matters will proceed ; but, if you have any property you care about, in the house, I should recommend the prudence of moving it to a more secure place ; every thing, you know, is liable to a seizure for rent and taxes.”

"I will follow your advice, to-morrow," replied Mr. Hunter : "In fact, I have nothing particularly costly here, almost nothing, but my clothes, and a few books. I should not like, either, to have my piano seized; for, though only a hired one, I fancy I should, in such a case, be made to pay for it—and soundly too."

"That you may rely upon—the price would be fixed at the choice of the owner."

"It goes home to morrow—that's decided," said Mr. Hunter, taking pen in hand, to despatch the necessary order for that purpose, "I did expect two gentlemen to dine with us to-morrow, and to practise some glees we are accustomed to perform together; but with the fear of so unpleasant an interruption before my eyes, I am convinced the trio would produce anything but glee to me. Miss Corner you see, is gone—driven off by the wasps, I fancy."

"I rather think she has had some dispute with our hostess—I overheard high words between them the day before she left us."

"So, so—and these Knightwells never came, you perceive—"

"Nor Miss Winterton, if you observe—"

"Very true—all is not right, I fear. However, the table is still most excellent; so I advise we take advantage of it while we may, and preserve ourselves from unpleasant casualties, by keeping little more than a change of linen here."

At this moment, the gentlemen were interrupted by an unusual commotion on the stairs. On leaving the parlour, to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, they perceived Mrs. Stonecroft, in an attitude of defiance, standing between two ill-looking fellows, one of whom had placed his arm across the stairs, to prevent the ascent of the Lady, saying, "No, no, my fine bird—we missed you that way last week—remember the back stairs, Snap—since we have caught you again, you do not so easily escape us."

"I escape, you fellow—what do you mean?" cried Mrs. Stonecroft, perceiving her boarders had become witnesses to the scene, and the consequent uselessness of further equivocation."

"Gentlemen," she added, "I appeal to your kindness, to release me from a temporary em-

barrassment, of which these men are taking an unworthy advantage, by endeavouring to deprecate me in the eyes of my family. I was unwilling, until thus forced into the measure, to communicate to you, that, in consequence of an incomprehensible delay in my West Indian remittances, I have taken the liberty of trespassing on my landlord's indulgence, some two or three weeks, under the idea of his being, as I was informed, a gentleman—I had not the smallest idea I should be treated but in a suitable manner. Mr. Snap, either of these gentlemen, I am quite sure, will bail me."

"We must first ascertain, my good lady, to what amount we may involve ourselves by so doing.

"I am grieved, Mr. Spritely, at the necessity which places me under so cautious a reservation of your assistance; I did not imagine that the trifle of rent due, since I have been in this house—"

"Have you other claims on the lady, beyond that of rent, Mr. Snap?

"A few, Sir, or so—I look upon it there will be a detainer or two—not as I wishes to make

mischief. If the lady finds good bail, I am willing to leave her here—though I must say my house is as comfortable a lock-up as there is—and no extortion. If the lady gets a habeas, it's all very well—she can but stay with me till she's better suited—as I says to all my birds—but, if they prefers a jail, Sir, why, to jail they must go, I suppose."

"This is really very distressing, Hunter—we cannot see our hostess carried off in this manner, without an effort to serve her. I am convinced the matter is trifling; Mrs. Stonecroft has repeatedly told me she has paid her bills monthly, since she first came here—the arrears can but be trifling—let us examine them."

"Here's a detainer to be put in from Cinnamon the grocer—six months' bills, seventy-nine pounds fifteen shillings.

"Another from Lamb, the butcher—one hundred and fifteen pounds nine shillings and sevenpence.

"Carp the fishmonger at Kingsmead, wants thirty-nine pounds two shillings and three-pence.

"Pigeon, the Poulterer—"

"Faith, she has pigeoned them all, at this rate," interrupted Mr. Hunter. "Pray, madam, allow me to ask you one question—have you paid one farthing to any of your tradespeople?"

"There's my salary," whispered James, who had formed one of the spectators, and was backed by the numerous Mistresses, described by Abraham as holding office—each now creeping forward to "hope the gentlemen would see them righted."

"The plot thickens upon us, I fear," said Mr. Spritely—I think, Madam, it will be impossible for us to undertake so serious a responsibility as your debts seem to involve."

"I beg you will not take the trouble of making excuses, Sir—My embarrassments are merely temporary—I have friends to come forward in my behalf, so soon as they can be made acquainted with my situation; and in the mean time, I am ready to attend these gentlemen"—with a bitter smile, bowing to the two bailiffs, and preceding them to the post-chaise they had kept in waiting.

"Who is to pay my salary?" shouted James, in an undaunted key.

"And all of us," said the cook.

"Take care of yourselves, good people," ejaculated Mrs. Stonecroft, from the window of the chaise, in which she had now seated herself: "I find this speculation does not answer; and, as I have for some weeks expected matters to arrive at this crisis, I have acted to the best of my ability. Not expecting any extraordinary care to be taken of whatever property I should leave behind me, I have had the precaution to move it to a place of safety—my slippers are in the dressing-room, Martha—you'll find little else, I believe—I think, gentlemen, I gave you each your receipts yesterday—adieu—"

The chaise rattled away, and the petrified family remained for some minutes stupidly staring after the head it had lost.

"Let us have dinner, at all events," at length exclaimed Mr. Spritely; "we will then consider what is most fitting to be done—by the bye, where is Captain Ward all this time?"

"Sure as death," cried the cook, "he is in college with missess. What was in that great poutmumble he packed off by the carrier this morning, James?"

"The articles of clothing which accompanied him here, for any thing I apprehend to the contrary."

"But I reprehend the contrary—and very contrary," pursued the cook. "Look, Martha, in Missess's drawers—and you may keep all you catch, or my name's not Baste."

"Sure enough she's right," gasped Martha, returning, out of breath, from her mission; "well, if I didn't expectorate something, these three days past, between the Captain and Missess—such whispering and consterpating up in corners."

"It seems but too evident—just look, however, in the Captain's room."

Not a vestige was there to be found of "the man of war;" and, on Mr. Spritely again desiring dinner might be served, James rushed from the dining-room, with consternation imprinted on every feature, declaring that he had prepared the table for dinner, just before admitting the two gentlemen who had taken his

mistress ; but that neither spoon, fork, or any article of plate, remained to deck the board. And each astonished auditor then recollect ed having seen Captain Ward pass through the gates during the parley in the hall, apparently with something very bulky in his pockets.

When the news of this event reached Dr. Slopall, he was reposing in a drowsy attitude, with the intention to aid the digesting a dinner, of which he had partaken more largely, perhaps, than he would have allowed any of his patients to do.

Abraham, as usual, was the disturber of the peaceful hour self-prescribed to the somewhat loaded organs of his master. His tale of the seizure, departure, &c. &c. of Mrs. Stonecroft from High-hill House, was embellished by divers additions it had received in the course of transmission to the care of Abraham (otherwise Job) Smith ; and, so hurriedly, so alarmingly was the intelligence conveyed, that, acting upon an overcharged system, the unfortunate Doctor gave—to his serving man one long, vacant stare—to his own peculiar disappointment, a groan of equal duration—and to

the world, his gallipots, leeches, and purple vase—Dropping instantaneously from the well-stuffed chair, in which he had reclined during his evening's doze, his cumbrous frame took possession of the hearth-rug ; and not all the combined exertions of Abraham and Mrs. Bennett, had power to restore to it the smallest spark of life.

So soon as the fact was evident to the terrified domestics, Dr. Slopall became one of those posthumous dignitaries, “the best of masters.” He was lauded and bewailed for nearly a fortnight by the blubbering Abraham, whose only consolation was in recounting his own peculiar sufferings in consequence of the fatal event. He it was who carried the distressing news of his loss to the Misses Wiggins ; the elder of whom had the power to conceal whatever tenderness of feeling might be supposed to result from the shock. Miss Peggy, on the plea of being less closely interested, was unwearying in her inquiries as to the most minute particulars connected with the Doctor's decease. She insisted on Abraham, again and again, describing to her the time, the manner, and the apparent means

of this melancholy event ; and each time, Mr. Smith's relation, was as nearly as possible, comprised in the following words.

" You see, Miss, Master, somehow or other, had got quite great, like, up at the House—some even said it was to be a match—perhaps I had as good rights as others to co-operate on the truth ; but it wasn't my place to talk of my master's affairs, and I said nothing further than this, I says one day to master, says I, ' I don't like that Mrs. Stonecroft,' I says, ' there's something,' I says, ' in her wisen mahogamy, as don't please me ;' and says Master, says he, ' you knows nothing about it,' he says, ' and I wish you wouldn't make use,' he says, ' of words you can't imprehend the use of.' Well, I thought no more of it, for he'd often snub me up like in that way ; so things went on, till the Friday as she was took. Master had happened to have a dinner he was uncommon partial to, (stewed eels, and a harico of mutton,)—well, I never see him eat heartier nor he did, and seemed like to enjoy his dinner ; and he says, ' Abraham,' he says, ' there's no knowing how long I may remain a bachelor,' he says, ' so I think I'll

divulge myself with a bottle of claret, for I shall have a quiet evening, I believe,' he says. So I fetched him the claret, and he'd pretty nearly drinthed it, when I took him the news how that Mrs. Stonecroft was taken off by two bailiffs, and how she'd contrived to strip the house of every thing, and left the gentlemen to dine upon what they liked best, and neither knives nor spoons, nor any imperials for the table, and her own clothes, and all the plate (carried off, I mean,) and servants' wages, and all the tradespeople left,—hat's, unpaid. Well, Miss, whether it was the news I took, or the dinner, or the claret, and I do say, that claret is a poor wishy-washy rattle-tripe kind of a drink, (saving your presence, Miss,) and what it was, or now it was, is more than I can extricate, but in a moment like, poor Master seemed to give a grip at the two arms of his chair, and down he tumbled quite ansensible on the hearthrug, in an attyplatty fit. Mrs. Bennett and me, we did all we could to serenade him, but Doctor Patchup of Kingsmead, he said, 'there was no doubt that life had become distinct the moment he fell; and that

all human means, even if he had been on the spot, must have proved impervious.' It's an awful thing, Miss, is sudden death," whispered Abraham, "or death of any kind, particular one's master; and now you see, here's Mrs. Bennett, and all of us, quite thrown out through it. The people from High-hill were all off the precipice, I hear, the next morning; servants unpaid, and every thing—not that I say I can pity the likes of them, I have seen too much of their scheming and roguery for that,—but I know I'm out of place, I'm competent sensible of that, and what to do I don't know. There's many a one in such a service as I've had, might a picked up physic enough to live by, that's physicking of others I mean; but I must say, master never was the man to lend himself to my destruction; and used to say, I couldn't learn Latin unless I'd been taught to read. I know there didn't seem to me to be much Latin wanting, to take a pinch out of one jar, and a drop of this bottle and that bottle, and fill it up with water: Akwy poor, master called it when folks were by—but I knew well enough, that pumped it, what he meant, when he'd call for more Akwy

poor, and it's likely the rest of his Latin was something of the same kind, and I'm perfect sure **I** could have countermanded it."

Abraham derived but little consolation from Miss Peggy, as to his future prospects; that lady gave him no hope of securing a second service, but, on the contrary, informed him of the project in which she still believed, and related to him, under the conviction that a few days would now honourably exonerate her from her promise of secrecy to Mr. Water Coke, the whole particulars of his supposed invention.

"Laws, Miss Peggy, you must be joking, sure," cried the bewildered Abraham.

"Abraham, *I never* joke. It is some years since, either my nerves or my spirits have permitted me so to do. What **I** tell you is a positive fact; and, moreover, we shall probably be the first persons in Brampton, to employ these machines, which doubtless will soon become so general as to supersede the necessity of servants."

Abraham gasped. Scarcely less astonished than when his late master had deceased, and probably even more alarmed than by that

untoward event ; he felt as if utter destitution was to be his lot.

" I should be sorry, of course, Miss Peggy," he at length began, " to gainsay what you please to deserve ; but I think it's impossible, if it comes to that, our king would sit by and see his objects driven to desperaciously, as I'm sure they must, if in case all this machinering and steamery goes on. Why, there won't be so much left as a groom's place, nor a 'ostler, nor nothing, at this rate. Here's the coaches agoing to run without horses, or wheels even ; and what's to become of the cattle nobody can tell, they talks of transporting them ; but I do say, it's a hard case upon the poor dumb animals, because they don't want 'em, for to send 'em to Botany Bay. I suppose I must just go back to plough, but look you there again, I take it ploughing will be done by steam, next ; for my part, I wish I'd been born, and had died before these improvements, as they call them, had come in fashion. I see no good it's to come to, not I."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE STEAMER.

ABRAHAM was no sooner released from the communicative Miss Peggy Wiggins, than he hied him to the Full Moon, to disgorge himself of the wonderful intelligence with which he had been charged by the spinster.

"What think you now, Mrs. Brewster? What is to happen next? Well might my great-grandfather say, wonders will never cease! Why, if them Miss Wigginses aint a going to set up a couple of jointed steam engines, by what I can make out, and mischarge poor Betty, and all of 'em, and do all the work by steam, besides cooking and waiting at table!"

"Nonsense, Abraham—what are you talking about?—steam-engines!"

"But, I tell you, it is not nonsense, but some sense, and very good sense—only, to be sure, it will be very bad for us servants—and what we are to do is a marble and a mystery to me. I tell you, Mrs. Brewster, I had the whole transmigration of it from Miss Peggy—and they are coming next week—"

"Who's coming next week—some new people, is it?"

"No, no; the engines, I tell you—dashed, if I don't wish Miss Wiggins may burn her fingers, and it won't be the first time, by all accounts, either."

"Ah, such screwing ways! what can come of it? Brewster! how came you to let Cinnamon's lad have his beer, without the money—I told you I wouldn't trust them a farthing more—don't we know, for positive, they're ruined, or very near it?"

"And what else do they deserve? Didn't they run after Mrs. Stonecroft's custom, like the rest of the fools?"

"And didn't they advise their last lodger to have a barrel of ale in, on purpose for

to spite us, and, may be, for Mrs. Cinnamon to have a drop, when she liked—and that wouldn't be seldom, for she drinks like a fish—we all know that. I don't pity them, not I, nor Lamb, nor none of them. I say it serves them all right, to be running cap-in-hand, as they was, before even they knew if she were a 'sponsible person or not: but that's always the way down here; every fresh family that come, the trades-people are ready to cut one another's throats for their custom; and, then when they are all swindled, there is a grand out-cry, of 'Who'd a thought it?' For my part, I guessed how matters would turn out, from the very first; and I took care to look pretty cool, the first time that fine footman came here—"

"Why, did he ever come here, then?" interrupted John Brewster; "that's more than ever I knew—what did he come for? I thought he was too grand for that—"

"Oh, he just came to bring his mistress's answer—"

"Answer to what?"

"Dear laws! how you cross-question one—why, about the ale, and all that. I sent up,

you know, of course, to say we had fine bottled ale, porter, cider, and so on, and a sample of brandy ; when the jackanapes comes simpering in, to desire I would not send my pot-boy up to the house, as it would give an idea, he said, that malt liquor was drank in the servants' hall !—a puppy !—his mistress, he said, never used any but white brandy, which she had very good from her wine merchant in London. I'd a mind to see how far his manners would take him. So says I, 'No offence, Sir,' I says, 'it's what it's customary down here, to wait upon new people for orders ; another time, perhaps,' I says, 'something may be wanted in our way ;' and, by way of civility, I says, 'What will you take this evening, Sir ?' I says ; and he pulled up his collar, and says he, 'Not a drop of any thing,' he says, 'I prefer Madeira,' he says, 'in general ; but the fact is,' he says, 'I am rather apt to be disordered by it, unless I meet with it of the very first quality,' he says, 'and I suppose,' he says, 'that is not likely to be the case,' he says, 'in a place like this.' There was impudence, for you ! I warrant he is glad of a draught of porter, by this time."

" Well, as I said before," exclaimed Abraham, " it's a marble to me what this world will come to. I've a notion this jockey's pride will be cut down, however, when these steam footmen are set agoing, that will be one good thing ; though, I reckon we shall all be put in hot water by the same means."

Abraham, being again called upon to explain the nature of the apparatus he persisted in forcing on the notice of Mrs. Brewster, proceeded to give such a description as his own cloudy ideas on the subject permitted. Whether he would have succeeded in conveying any image to the mind of his auditors, is a point which remains doubtful, as he was, at the commencement of his relation, interrupted by the entrance of a certain ill-dressed person, first introduced to the reader in the library of Kingsmead, and known to them by the name of Mr. Water Coke. The dress of this rusty individual, differed scarcely, if at all, from that in which he made his first bow to Miss Peggy Wiggins. This circumstance needs no other explanation, than that of my telling the reader it was the selfsame, and, indeed, only suit of the projector ; and,

having suffered but few attacks of the brush, during his sojourn on the Mall, remained in that state of shabbiness to which the demi-jour the spinsters allowed to penetrate their sanctorum, proved so kind a concealment. In his hand Mr. Water Coke carried a small portmanteau, his smallest, his largest, his all! and, depositing the same on the floor, he inquired how soon there would be a coach passing to London.

Mrs. Brewster looked at the stranger; a smileless look, for his appearance claimed no other; then at the clock, and, in a careless tone, replied,

“In about half an hour. You can sit down, if you like—suppose you don’t wish to take any thing—come far to-day?” with another scrutinizing glance at his rustiness.

“Not very far,” replied the man of steam; “but I should, nevertheless, have no objection to a glass of your ale; for, to tell you the truth, I have been a boarder under the roof of Miss Wiggins, for the last few weeks; and, therefore, need not say my appetite is somewhat sharply set.”

“Boarding at Miss Wiggins’s!” cried Mrs.

Brewster. "Nay, then, I am sure, Sir, you may well look hungry. You'll excuse the remark, but, really, when you came in, I thought you had a famished appearance about you. But, dear me, how snug they've kept you, Sir! why, I never so much as knew they had a boarder; and it's a wonder, too, for it's little there's done in Brampton, but what is talked about—not that ever I know what's going on, for my part. I never pry into my neighbours' affairs, not I. I have no time for gossipping. So, you have been some weeks there, I think you said, Sir? Well! I should like to know how many ounces of meat they have set before you in the time. They have no other boarders, I believe, Sir?"

"Not any."

"Ah! so I judged: and now, Sir, how do you think they can keep that house open? there's three servants, I hear, and washing put out? You've left for good, I suppose, Sir?"

"I hope so: I have no wish, certainly, to return there; in fact, I am rather anxious to get to town as soon as possible. Will the coach soon be here, do you suppose?"

"Directly, Sir, I expect ; but, dear me, I can't make out how you should have been some weeks with them skinflints, and I never to hear a syllabus about it?"

It so happened, that this, perhaps the only secret the spinsters had ever preserved, was owing to (as they supposed) a consideration for their own interest. There might indeed be a lurking anticipation of the triumphant joy with which their friend Mr. Water Coke's invention was soon to astonish the world in general, and Brampton in particular. And they had succeeded, even to their own amazement, in keeping his residence a profound secret. Some ingenuity was required, to procure the silence of the servants ; but this, also, was accomplished, by the mechanist himself, for, under pretence of hiding from the wrath of a miserly uncle, and with a promise of a sovereign to each damsel at the end of the month, (that being the period stated to be necessary to maintain silence,) the fact of Mr. Water Coke's residence on Brampton Mall had actually never transpired.

Now, if, as I firmly believe, this was the first and only time the Wigginses had

remained tattle-proof ; I must say, the result was such as to justify gossiping from that time forth for evermore. It grieves me to confess they had been egregiously imposed on by their ill-clad inmate, who had contrived to pick, or scrape up, a living from even their barren housekeeping, for the space of a month ; and on his entering the Full Moon, he had just managed to decamp with his worldly goods in one hand, and in his pocket a half-sovereign, which he had that morning beguiled from the purse of Mrs. Whine. In extenuation of this last offence, I may observe, it was the first attempt he had made on the ladies, in the borrowing department, as he had penetration enough to discover that it would have been unavailable : nor would Mrs. Whine have committed so imprudent an act, but that she was applied to in a masterly manner to change a sovereign, and, being too proud to own she had but ten shillings of the current cash of this realm, she let it go, to save appearances.

Mr. Water Coke's absence was unnoticed, nay, unknown, till the following morning. He had been in the constant habit of retiring

to his own room on the disappearance of their scanty dinner, and had watched his opportunity so well as to slip out unobserved ; kindly omitting to alarm the sensitive nerves of Miss Peggy by slamming (as it is called) the hall-door, but, leaving it ajar, he glided forth, and proceeded with all speed to the Full Moon, where, owing to the incognita he had preserved, his person was unknown. His meagre aspect had there worked upon even the cautious Mrs. Brewster, to regale him with a sandwich and a glass of ale. Many and pertinent were the questions the loquacious landlady addressed to the hungry steamer, while he most voraciously despatched her sandwich. Fain would she have extracted from her visitor the entire and minutest details connected with the household affairs of the old women, as she irreverently designated his late hostesses. But Mr. Water Coke (or Mr. whatever else he might more justly be called) was by far too well employed at that moment, to find it convenient to hear the incessant interrogatories of Mrs. Brewster. By dint of powerful mastication, he had discussed the last mouthful of his welcome

meal as the coach drove up to the door, and chance had so ordered matters in his favour that at this critical instant the dispenser of "heavy-wet," (genteelly written, porter,) was summoned to a gentleman in the parlour. On returning thence, her ever vigilant eye caught sight of the flap of the aforesaid rusty black coat, as, in stepping on to the roof, it rose above the flaming sign of the Full Moon. Quickly did the anxious dame rush to the door, alas ! it was too late, her voice was drowned in the rattle of wheels—her outstretched arm, was interpreted as a parting salute to the stranger, who gallantly and repeatedly kissing his hand, as if in return of her friendly adieu, turned to the coachman, saying, "Nice little woman, that Mrs. Brewster, very civil little woman, indeed!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE SWAN RIVER.

ABOUT this period of my history, an audience was one day requested of me, on the part of Mrs. Fidkins — my interference in whose financial affairs had terminated in the loss, if loss it could be called, of her husband.

She brought a letter which she had that morning received from the runaway and requested my advice upon the same, touching the prudence of withdrawing her little hoard from the Savings Bank, for the purpose of administering to his wants or comforts, as the case might be.

The epistle of Peter Fidkins was worded in a style of mystification more than sufficient

to baffle the muddled brains of his poor wife ; and, indeed, requiring no little time and attention, first to decipher, and, in the next place, to translate and fathom the same. It ran as follows :

“ Deer Betsey,

“ You will bee surprised, no doubt, at seein my hand of rite after wat as past. wen I left Brampton, it was me intention to go to a merry K. but at Liverple met with 2 young men, like mee, on there travels, and was over perswaded to halter my plan, and goe toe the Swan river. wch its a very nice plase, and ave no doubt of making it, in time, kwite komfortable to ave our fammilee over toe us, wch its wat wee woodent wish, not till sich times we get a hous or too bilt at prison been only at work a fencing of the wild beests, which, when weve kutt down wood enufe, we mean to bild ouses for our wifes. off the time shall give further Notiss. Wich not noin disactly the tooles proper came fuleishlee without. and this toe rickwest you wud—soon as possible on getin this, toe take out monney for purchassin folloin harticles,

which they'le come quite saef by Sheep, from Liverple.

" 3 strong atshets for cutin wud.  
" 3 dittow sawes, defrent cises.  
" Won dussin nives, strong, of all cises.  
" A larg hiron cittle for kukin.  
" Plains, 3 or 4.  
" Som chisells, not too smal.  
" Ammers wee ave.  
" 3 gimlits.  
" 2 dussin inges for doores.  
" dittow loks and kees.  
" 3 thousen tenpenny nales.  
" dittow fipenny.  
" dittow tax. hiron.  
" dittow tintax.  
" sum greed hirons, frien panes, bilers and cittles for kukin, as non's to be gott ear; also, fier hirons, fendus, spaeds, shuvels, and hal kind of ardwaer as is in kommen yoos—for same reson. and Bee sewer send plentee hof all, has its won expens, and toe pa the karridge, as weeve no monney at prison, an wen hals compleet, shal send for our deer wifes to partace this parry dice, wich the Klimatts very much licked by the inglisch, as

its more setteld, and evy doos reglar at nites,  
with grate eats in the day—but wen our ouses  
is bilt, shant mind it soe much, besides kep-  
in hout the whild beests. and ope hevery  
thing will cum before the rany ceson, has  
weve no shelter till sich times. wich with  
grate indoostrie ope to get a livin, as no nei-  
bors to chat with, losin thime as in hingland.  
and heneys little harticles of furniter yoe no  
best wats useful, kud cum at same thime—  
and bee for your advantedge too, wen you  
cum—wich ope it will be soon, and if you  
cud reduce sum elthie ard-workin wimen to  
cum with you—but non from Brampton hi-  
delness wont do hear, wich Sossiaty is nooter-  
liced, and Jones as gud as mi ladi hear. and  
wen the ouses is bilt, shall want for nothin  
but a foo wimen, and any beests of burdin  
yoe kan bring over with you, soe much  
beter.

“ And ope yoole luke over wat I rote, wen  
startin, has hive sin more of the woorld  
since, and kwite haltered karakter, wich I  
mean to be a cinder husband than never—and  
henny monney you ave left, toe la it hout in

wat's in daly yoos—as ther's nothin hear but land, an wud, and water, wich we gets them hal fre and no tackses.

" Halso advize the wimen to bring watever they kan. and no fere of usbans—won of my kumpanyons is a karpenter wich its a grate thing for us, has the huther was brote up to noe traid and theres a cettlment about thirty miles of wear theirs more men tell the wimen. and wen you come, to mind bein himposed hon be the Calors wich their kweere pipell and wen they kross the line as its onst a yere will be for cutin ther jokes, an shaived mee with a hold oop all i kud say thogh praps wimen ittel be def runt—an used a rusty nife too the karpenter but the huther gott hoff with pain a bottle Room—and its an imposishon has thirs no line but only they sed we kud a sin it if wed nowd jograffy. an dresst up won in a whig an henother ad a pitchfork and sed they was nipkin an is wife amphitrytty, wich twas nothin but the boatsen and kuke dresst hup—and yule see strang things ear wich theirs black swans an cangeeroos and parrots plenti, an the knatifs gose naykid without

shoose or stockens—but not too mind that  
tell the wimen, wich the trees is green hal the  
yere an fruite for pickin’.

Soe noo moor at prison from yure  
effecshoned usband

PETER FIDKINS.

and a hogsedd or too mite bring the things an  
wud be yoosful hafter an direct

too mee  
at Fidkins swamp  
near baren Land  
hon the Swan Rivver.”

After fagging through the above difficult epistle, I turned my attention to the countenance of Mrs. Fidkins, where I saw at one glance that she contemplated adding one to the already considerable number of women whose name ought to be, Credulity. As a matter of course, I inquired what her opinion of her husband's request was?

“I can't make my mind up, what to think, Ma'am, without your advice,” said she, “and that made me so bold to come and ask the favour, as you had always been so kind a friend—”

"In the first place, let me ask you, Mrs. Fidkins, have you the slightest idea of going in search of your husband?"

"I really don't know what to do—he seems to wish it, poor fellow—and—"

"And you mean to strip yourself of this little hoard, you had trusted to look to in case of need, and will throw it away on a man who never yet gave you any thing but ill usage?"

"You see, Ma'am, he says he's going to 'halter,' and I'm in hopes—"

"I think, in that case," I interrupted, "you might expect to be left at peace by him; but, I believe, before so desirable an event takes place, he will have robbed you of every shilling you now possess."

"I was thinking, if I went out with these things he has written for, they would be safer, and shouldn't mind about having a house at once—I could be wherever he is, to be sure."

"Just tell me one thing, Mrs. Fidkins. I think, if I remember right, you, on a former occasion, told me, that, during the fifteen years of your married life, you had not passed

a single day exempt from his brutality and cruelty, in one shape or other?"

"It's very true, Ma'am; he used me worse than a dog, I will say that: I can safely declare, I never heard his voice, even, without trembling like a leaf: and well I might, for I shall carry the marks of his violent temper to my grave:—but, now he's so far off, it makes a difference—"

"A very agreeable one, I should think, and one very conducive to the soundness of your limbs in general—not to mention your head, which, I think, he broke some six or eight times, did he not?"

"That was when he'd use to be in his tantrams, and in liquor—I can't say he ever laid the weight of his hand on me, only when he was the 'worse of liquor.' "

"Which circumstance, being of daily occurrence, I believe—"

"But he might be better now, Ma'am—"

"He might be so, indeed; and you might be wiser; that is, if Heaven had willed it so. However, I see how it is, and am sorry I cannot serve you. I will give you only one word of advice. In addition to the articles your

husband has sent for, take him a cat-o'-nine-tails; and, if he do not apply it to your shoulders, I must say you will receive less than your deserts."

"What am I to do?" whimpered the simoleon: "I must go to service, if I remain here."

"Depend on it, to a much lighter service than that your husband will inflict. I can offer you a home, at once, indeed, for my present cook being a much finer lady than I require, is leaving me next week. I have seen sufficient proofs of your skill, during the time my friend was your lodger, to feel confident of your abilities in that department. Take a day to consider of my proposal, and give me your determination to-morrow."

On the following morning, I learned that Mrs Fidkins had called, before I was up, had left her duty and "all that sort of thing," and was going to the Savings bank, to take out her money—grateful for my past kindness, &c. but thought she had better go to her husband, or her mind would not be easy.

"What a fool she must be, Ma'am," added Mary, who delivered the message to me; "I

never see such a fool in my life ; she seemed quite glad you were not come down ; and, no wonder, for she must have been ashamed to have seen you ; and even said, Ma'am, you was very good, but being a widow, (I beg pardon Ma'am,) it was different like, to married people : well, to be sure, to think there should be such fools let to live," pursued Mary, as she left the room with uplifted hands.

It is a strange world this we live in ! there's no denying that, was my reflection : here, now, is this poor woman running her head into the fire —ay, squeezing it between the very bars, and with her eyes open. It is all right, I suppose ; though it appears, in my poor judgment, as if one half the world were born to impose, and the other half to be imposed upon : we hear of the force of habit, and, truly, it must be something powerful, when we daily observe the tenacity with which we cling to our misfortunes. Mrs. Fidkins reminds me of a remark made upon a widower, who had married a second wife ; and of whom it was shrewdly observed, that " God forgave him once, and he married again."

I had not time for pursuing my reflections

farther, being summoned to attend the surveyor I had called in for the purpose of ascertaining whether it would be either prudent or possible to remain in safety at Land-to-let Villa, during the three months unexpired of my lease.

I had waged a long and expensive war with my various enemies, in the shape of rats, mice, water-nymphs, and thunder-showers—willing to retain possession of the garrison against all besiegers; but an enormous crack in the ceiling of the drawing-room gave symptom of a visitor I should have felt rather disturbed to be broken in upon by. No less an intruder than my own bedstead, appeared likely to drop in with as much ease as did any of my London acquaintances; and I must confess, I neither felt comfortable in the expectation of so heavy a guest, nor in the probability of being forced to take a rapid journey through the floor at a moment's notice. One has many little arrangements to make previous to leaving home; and, besides, I am rather fastidious as to the mode in which I travel. So I sent for my worthy friend, Mr. Linerod, who, after a strict examination, congratulated me on having as yet escaped any thing unpleasant

(yes, *unpleasant* was the expressive word applied to the being pulverized,) and that he strongly recommended my not risking my precious life another night beneath so unsatisfactory a roof as that of my present habitation.

"Rather provoking, too, Mr. Linerod, to throw away three months' rent."

"It is so, madam; but surely, I should think, in such a case, you might recover—"

"The crushing, do you mean, or the rent, Mr. Linerod?"

"The rent, madam, by law, I should rather calculate."

"Excuse me, Sir. The bruises I might have some chance of surviving; but allow me to remark, I have had, at different periods of my life, quite as much law as I can afford to pay for. If I did not at the same time gain justice, I may hope it was made up to me in experience. No, Mr. Linerod, the laws of this country I believe to be unexceptionable, and they must prove delightful to those who can afford to indulge in such luxuries. For my own part, I am free to confess the speci-

men of them I have enjoyed, leaves me quite content without farther trial. I have obtained the expensive information that will enable me in future to hug the first loss, rather than contest the matter by what is called course of law; and am nearly of a mind with an Hibernian friend of mine, whose pocket was being most palpably picked by a fellow traveller in a stage-coach, but who managed the affair so clumsily, that my friend, fearing he should be forced to notice the offence, turned his face most industriously towards the opposite window—at the same time saying, ‘I don’t see you at all, at all, honest man.’ ”

My difficulties were compromised by taking up my quarters in a spare bed—avoiding the use of the drawing-room, where the chances of pulverization were too great to make it pleasant—and resolving to divide my time between the breakfast-room and the aforesaid little spare room adjoining, until I could arrange matters for leaving this comfortless abode.

And it was with feelings like those I should

It is experienced a change from  
the former to the latter.  
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